

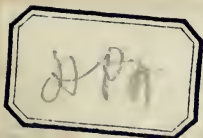


John George Mortlock

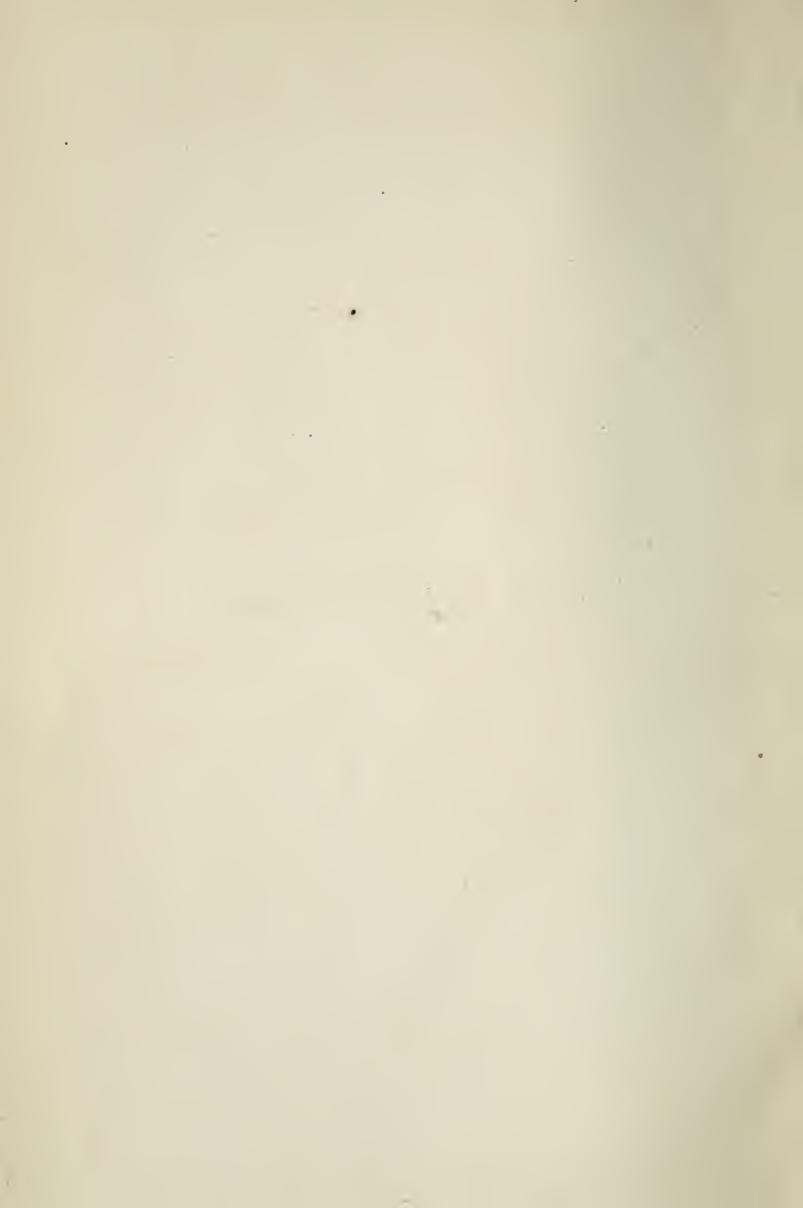


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THE YELLOW FLAG.



THE YELLOW FLAG.

A Novel.

BY EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF 'A WAITING RACE,' 'BROKEN TO HARNESS,' ETC.,

'That single effort by which we stop short in the downhill path to perdition is itself a greater exertion of virtue than an hundred acts of justice.' OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST. STRAND.

1872.


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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.



CHAP.	PAGE
I. BREAKING THE NEWS	1
II. A CONFIDENTIAL MISSION	27
III. A CHECK	52
IV. TAKE HER UP TENDERLY	77
V. PARSON'S WORK	103
VI. RUN TO EARTH	127
VII. A THIRD IN THE PLOT	150
VIII. SO FAR SUCCESSFUL	174
IX. THE SMALL HOURS IN LONDON	197
X. THE SMALL HOURS IN HENDON	218
XI. MRS. CALVERLEY LOSES HER COMPANION	242



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THE YELLOW FLAG.



CHAPTER I.

BREAKING THE NEWS.

DOCTOR HAUGHTON stared hard at his old friend, who had just made such an astounding announcement—stared hard, but said nothing. Naturally a reticent man, in his capacity of physician he had had a great many odd things confided to him in his life, and had consequently not merely learned the value of silence, but had almost lost the faculty of astonishment.

After a minute's pause he turned to the little crowd, and said in a quiet, business-like way, 'Just four of you lift this poor gentleman's body, two at the head and two at the

feet, and carry it over to the tavern I see on the other side of the road.—Gibson,' to the coachman, 'you go with them and pay them for their trouble. See it properly placed on a bed or sofa somewhere, and have the door locked, and tell the landlord he will be properly paid, and that a hearse will come out and fetch it away this evening.'

When Gibson returned and reported that all these directions had been properly obeyed, he mounted his box again, and the gentlemen, re-entering the carriage, drove off swiftly towards London, leaving the little crowd in the road gazing after them.

The gentlemen inside the brougham composed themselves comfortably, each in his corner, looking out of the window, and waiting for the other to speak. Each was most anxious to hear all that the other might have to tell him, but both knew the professional etiquette of caution so well that neither liked to be the first to commence the conversation. At length Mr. Broadbent, who was a year or two younger, and considerably more impulsive

than his friend, broke the silence by saying, in a casual manner, and as though the subject had but little interest for him, 'Odd that I should have been talking to you about that man this morning, and that we should have come upon him just now, wasn't it?'

'Very odd; very odd indeed,' said Doctor Haughton; 'quite a coincidence! Odd thing, too, his going under two names. Mr. Calverley certainly could not be called an eccentric man.'

'Nor could Mr. Claxton, so far as I have seen of him at least,' said Mr. Broadbent; 'a thoroughly steady-going man of business, I should say.'

'Ah!' said Doctor Haughton. And then there was a pause, broken by the doctor's saying, as he looked straight out of the window before him, 'No need of asking what made the man adopt this mystery and this alias, eh? A woman, of course?'

'Well, there certainly is a Mrs. Claxton,' said Mr. Broadbent, 'and a very pretty woman too.'

‘Poor creature, poor creature!’ said Doctor Haughton; ‘such things as these always fall hardest upon them.’

‘Yes, it’s a bad thing for her losing her husband,’ said Mr. Broadbent.

‘Her husband!’ echoed Doctor Haughton. ‘I—I—I suppose every one at Hendon thought she was Calverley’s wife?’

‘Thought she was!’ cried Mr. Broadbent; ‘do you mean to say she wasn’t?’

‘Why, my good friend,’ said Doctor Haughton, pushing his hat on the back of his head and staring at his companion, ‘there’s a Mrs. Calverley at home in Great Walpole-street, whither we are now going, to whom Calverley has been married for the last ten or fifteen years.’

‘Good Heaven!’ cried Mr. Broadbent; ‘then that poor girl at Rose Cottage is—ah, poor child, poor child!’ And he sighed and shook his head very sorrowfully. He knew at that moment that so soon as the story got wind he would have to brave his wife’s anger, and the virtuous indignation of all his neigh-

bours, who would be furious at having him in their spotless domiciles after his attendance on such a 'creature;' but his first emotions were pity for the girl, however erring she might be.

'Very distressing indeed,' said Doctor Haughton, blowing his nose loudly. 'It is a most extraordinary thing that men who are liable to a cardiac affection are not more careful in such matters. And the girl is pretty too, you say?'

'Very pretty, young, and interesting,' said Mr. Broadbent kindly.

'Ah!' commented Dr. Haughton; 'doesn't resemble Mrs. Calverley much, as you will say when you see her. No doubt poor Calverley—however, that's neither here nor there. Do you know this is a remarkably unpleasant business, Broadbent?'

'It is indeed,' said Mr. Broadbent, 'and for both the families.'

'Yes, and for us, my good friend,' said Doctor Haughton, 'for us, who have to break the news to one of them within the next half hour. Where on earth can we say we found

the man? I suppose he was living out at this box of his, wasn't he?'

'Yes, he has been there for the last few days. He was in the habit of passing a week or ten days there, and then going off, as Mrs. Claxton told me, on business journeys connected with the firm of which he was a partner.'

'That exactly tallies with Calverley's own life. He was absent from his home about every fortnight to look after, as he said, some iron-works in the North. It is very little wonder that a man leading a double life of such enormous excitement should bring upon himself a cardiac attack. Such a steady sobersides as he looked too! Gad, Broadbent, I shouldn't be surprised if you were to turn out a Don Juan next!'

'No fear of that,' said Mr. Broadbent, with a half smile; 'but really this is a most unpleasant position for us. Where can we say we found the poor fellow? We cannot possibly tell Mrs. Calverley we picked him up on the roadside, as he was probably supposed by

her to be travelling in the North. And yet she must know the truth some day.'

'Yes, but not yet,' said Doctor Haughton, 'nor need we take upon ourselves the trouble and anxiety of telling her. We can say to Mrs. Calverley that this poor man was found dead in a railway carriage, which she would be ready to believe, imagining him to be on his return from the ironworks. And then we could tell Mr. Gurwood, a clergyman, her son by her former husband, who happens to be stopping in the house, how the matter really stands, and get him to explain it to her on some future occasion.'

Mr. Broadbent agreed to this mechanically; indeed he was but little concerned about Mrs. Calverley, and was wondering what would become of the poor little woman at Rose Cottage when she should hear the fearful news.

'And I'll tell you what, my dear Broadbent,' continued Doctor Haughton, after a pause, 'if you don't mind my giving you a little advice. I should let this young woman

up at Hendon find out this news by herself—I mean to say, I shouldn't tell her. No one knows that you know anything about it; and it is as well for a professional man to mix himself up in such matters under such circumstances as little as possible.'

Mr. Broadbent again signified his assent. He was a kindly-hearted man, but he knew that from a worldly point of view his companion's advice was sound, and he determined to act upon it, remembering Mrs. Broadbent's tongue.

So the two gentlemen journeyed on until the carriage pulled up in front of the dull, grim, respectable house in Great Walpole-street, and there, feeling very nervous despite their professional training, they alighted.

There was no need to give their names, for the butler recognised Doctor Haughton at once, and ushered the gentlemen into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Calverley was seated alone, with the eternal Berlin-wool frame in front of her. She looked up at the butler's announcement, rose from her seat,

and stood with her hands crossed primly before her, waiting to receive her visitors.

Doctor Haughton advanced, and taking one of her cold flat hands shook it in a purely professional manner, and then let it drop. Nor could Mrs. Calverley, however acute she might have been, have gleaned any intelligence from the doctor's look, which was also purely professional, and met her steely blue eyes as though it were inspecting her tongue. But Mrs. Calverley was not acute, and she merely said, 'How do you do, Doctor Haughton?' in her thin acid voice, and stared blankly at Mr. Broadbent, as though wondering how he came there.

'This is Mr. Broadbent, an old friend of mine, and a medical man of great experience, whose company I was fortunate enough to have on this very melancholy occasion.'

Doctor Haughton laid great stress upon the last words; but Mrs. Calverley took them very calmly, merely saying 'Yes;' and rubbing the palms of her silk mittens softly together.

‘I am afraid I have not succeeded in making you understand, Mrs. Calverley, that a great misfortune has befallen you.’

‘The Swartmoor Ironworks,’ said Mrs. Calverley, suddenly brightening up. ‘I always said—but how could you know about them?’

‘The calamity to which I am alluding is, I regret to say, much more serious than any mere business loss,’ replied Doctor Haughton gravely. ‘Mr. Calverley has been out of town for some little time, I believe?’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Calverley, becoming rigid with rage; ‘he is away carrying out some of those ridiculous schemes in which he wastes our money and—’

‘Do not speak harshly, my dear madam,’ said the doctor, laying his hand upon her arm. ‘I am sure you will regret it. Mr. Calverley is very ill, dangerously ill.’

Mrs. Calverley looked up sharply into his face. ‘Stop one minute, Doctor Haughton, if you please; I should wish my son, the Reverend Martin Gurwood, to be present at

any communication you have to make to me respecting Mr. Calverley. He is somewhere in the house, I know. I will send for him.' And she rang the bell.

'By all means,' said Doctor Haughton, looking helplessly at Mr. Broadbent, and feeling how very much more difficult it would be to tell his white lie, prompted though it was by merciful consideration, in the presence of a clergyman.

In a few minutes Martin Gurwood entered the room. He knew Doctor Haughton, and shook hands with him; bowing to Mr. Broadbent, to whom he was introduced.

'Doctor Haughton was beginning to make some communication to me about Mr. Calverley,' said Mrs. Calverley, 'and I thought it better, Martin, that you should be present.'

Martin Gurwood bowed, and looked inquiringly at the doctor.

'It is, I regret to say, a very painful communication,' said Doctor Haughton, in answer to this mute appeal. 'Mr. Calverley was found this afternoon in a very critical state in

a—in a railway carriage on the—on the Great Northern line,’ said the doctor, with some little hesitation, feeling himself grow hot all over.

Mr. Broadbent, feeling the actual responsibility thus lifted from his shoulders, preserved a perfectly unruffled demeanour, and nodded his head in solemn corroboration.

‘May I ask how you came to hear of this, Doctor Haughton?’ said Martin.

‘It so happened,’ said the doctor, ‘that I had been called in consultation to a case at—a short distance from town’—it would never do to name the exact place while this woman is present, he thought to himself—‘and we were returning in the train when the discovery was made, and we at once offered our services, little thinking that the unfortunate sufferer would prove to be an acquaintance of mine.’

‘Some one must go to him at once,’ said Martin, looking hard at his mother.

‘It is a great pity that Madame Du Tertre is not in the way just now when she is—

wanted,' said Mrs. Calverley, quietly; 'this seems exactly one of the occasions—'

'There is no necessity for anyone to go,' interrupted Doctor Haughton; 'all that it is possible to do has been done.'

'Do you consider Mr. Calverley to be in danger?' asked Martin, anxiously.

'In extreme danger,' replied the doctor; and then catching Mr. Gurwood's eye, he endeavoured by the action of his mouth to frame the word 'dead.' But Mrs. Calverley's steely eyes were upon him at the same moment, and she guessed his meaning.

'You are endeavouring to deceive me, Doctor Haughton,' said she with her stoniest manner; 'Mr. Calverley is dead.'

'My dear mother,' said Martin, leaving his chair, and putting his arms round her.

'I can bear it, Martin,' said Mrs. Calverley coldly; 'this is not the first time I have known suffering. My life has been one long martyrdom.'

'Is this true?' asked Martin, turning to the doctor.

‘I regret to say it is,’ said Doctor Haughton. ‘Out of consideration for Mrs. Calverley’s feelings, I endeavoured to break the news as gently as possible, but it is better that she should know the truth as she does now.’

‘It is some consolation for me to think,’ said Mrs. Calverley, in measured tones, ‘that I never failed to utter my protest against these reckless journeys, and that if Mr. Calverley had not obstinately persisted in ignoring my advice, on that as on every other point, he might have been here at this moment.’

‘What was the immediate cause of death?’ asked Martin Gurwood hurriedly, for his mother’s tone and manner jarred harshly on his ear.

‘It is impossible to say without—without an examination,’ said the doctor, lowering his voice; ‘but I should say, from the mere cursory glance we had, that death probably arose from pericarditis—what you would know as disease of the heart.’

‘And that might be brought on by what?’

‘It would probably be the remnant of some attack of rheumatic fever under which the deceased had suffered at some period of his life. But it has probably been accelerated or increased by excess of mental excitement or bodily fatigue.’

‘There need have been no question of excitement or fatigue either, if my advice had been followed,’ said Mrs. Calverley, with a defiant sniff; if Mr. Calverley had been more in his home—’

‘Yes, mother; this is scarcely the time to enter into such questions,’ said Martin Gurwood severely, for he was ashamed of his mother’s peevish nagging. ‘What arrangements have you made, doctor, in regard to the body of our poor friend?’

‘None whatever at present,’ said the doctor; ‘we did the best we could temporarily, but this is a matter in which I thought it would be better to speak with you—alone,’ he added, after a pause, glancing at Mrs. Calverley.

But that lady sat perfectly unmoved. ‘Will there be an inquest?’ she asked.

‘I trust not, madam,’ said the doctor dryly; for he was much scandalised at Mrs. Calverley’s hardness and composure. ‘I shall use all the influence I have to prevent any such inquiry, for the sake of the poor gentleman who is dead, and whom I always found a kind-hearted liberal man.’

‘I know nothing about his liberality,’ said Mrs. Calverley, only exhibiting her appreciation of the doctor’s tone by a slight increase in the rigidity of her back; ‘but I know that, like most of his other virtues, it was never exhibited towards me, or in his own home.’

‘I never saw Mr. Calverley except in this house,’ remarked the doctor angrily. Then turning to Martin, he said, ‘These arrangements that we spoke of, had we not better go into them?’

‘I think so,’ said Martin. Then turning to Mrs. Calverley, he added, ‘My dear mother, I must have a little business-talk with Doctor Haughton about some matters in connexion with this melancholy affair which it might perhaps be painful for you to listen to, and at

which there is happily no necessity for your presence. Shall we go into the drawing-room or—'

'Pray don't trouble yourself; I will relieve you of my company at once,' said Mrs. Calverley. And with a very slight inclination to the visitors she rose and creaked out of the room.

The usual pallor of Martin Gurwood's face was covered by a burning flush. 'You must excuse my mother, Doctor Haughton, and you too, if you please, sir,' turning to Mr. Broadbent. 'Her sphere in life has been very narrow, and I am constrained to admit that her manner is harsh and forbidding. But it is manner, and nothing more.'

'Some persons are in the habit of disguising the acuteness of their feelings under a rough exterior,' said the doctor; 'Mrs. Calverley may belong to that class. At all events, subjects of this kind are better discussed without women, and we have a communication to make to you which it is absolutely necessary she should know nothing of, at least for the present.'

Martin Gurwood rose from his chair and walked to the mantelpiece, where he stood for a moment, his head resting on his hand. When he turned round his face had resumed its usual pallor, was, indeed, whiter than usual, as he said: 'I have guessed from the first that you had something to say to me, and I have a fearful idea that I guess its purport. Mr. Calverley has committed suicide?'

'No, I think not; I certainly think not,' said the doctor. 'What do you say, Broadbent?'

'Most decidedly not,' said Mr. Broadbent. 'When I saw him yesterday, even in the cursory examination which I was able to make, I satisfied myself that there were symptoms of pericarditis, and I will stake my professional reputation it was that that killed him.'

'When you saw him yesterday?' repeated Martin Gurwood, looking blankly at the surgeon. 'Why, yesterday he must have been in the North. It was on his return journey thence, as I understood, that he died in the train.'

‘Yes, exactly,’ said Doctor Haughton, ‘this is just the point where a little explanation is necessary. The fact is, my dear sir, that our poor friend did not die in the train at all, but on the public road, the high road leading to Hendon, where he lived.’

‘Where he lived!’ cried Martin Gurwood. ‘You are speaking in riddles, which it is impossible for me to understand. I must ask you to be more explicit, if you wish me to comprehend you.’

‘Well, then, the fact of the matter is, that our poor friend for some years past has led a kind of double life. Here and in Mincing-lane he was, of course, Mr. Calverley; but at Hendon, where, as I said before, he sometimes lived, having a very pretty place there, he passed as Mr. Claxton.’

‘Claxton!’ cried Martin; ‘it is the name of one of the firm.’

‘Yes,’ said the doctor; ‘I have always understood that Mr. Claxton was a sleeping partner in the firm. Our friend here,’ pointing to Mr. Broadbent, ‘thought so, as well

as many others. No doubt the suggestion originated with the poor man himself, who thought that some day his connexion with the firm might crop up, and that this would prove a not ineffectual blind.'

'What an extraordinary idea!' said Martin Gurwood. 'And he took this house at Hendon, and lived there, you say, from time to time.'

'Exactly,' said Doctor Haughton, looking hard at him.

'As an occasional retreat, doubtless, to which he could retire from the worries of business and—other things. You are a man of the world, Doctor Haughton, and though you have not been much at this house, you must have remarked that my mother is somewhat exacting, and scarcely calculated to make a comfortable home for a man of poor Mr. Calverley's cheerful temperament. I can understand his not telling his wife of the existence of this little retreat.'

'Yes—why—he,' said Doctor Haughton dryly; 'there was another reason why he did

not mention its existence to Mrs. Calverley. The fact is, that this little retreat had another occupant.' And the doctor paused and looked at Martin with a serio-comic expression.

'I am at a loss again,' said the clergyman; 'I do not understand you.'

'My good sir,' said Doctor Haughton, 'your parish must lie a long way out of the world. Don't you comprehend? Mr. Calverley did not live alone at Hendon; there was a young woman there.'

'What!' cried Martin Gurwood, staggering back against the mantelpiece; 'do you mean to say that this man, so looked up to and respected, has been living for years in open crime?'

'Scarcely in open crime, my good sir,' said the doctor, 'as is proved by the fact that it has been kept quiet so long. Moreover, he is gone, poor fellow; and though there can be no question of his guilt, there may have been what the lawyers call extenuating circumstances. I fancy, from what I saw of him, that Mr. Calverley was of all men inclined

to be happy in his home, had matters run smoothly.'

'I think you are very right, sir,' said Martin Gurwood; 'and it is not for me to judge him, Heaven knows, nor,' he added, seeing the doctor's eyes firmly fixed on him, 'nor any other sinful man. You have so astonished me by your revelation that I feel myself almost incapable of any farther action at present. You did perfectly right in concealing this dreadful story from my mother; she must be kept in ignorance of it as long as possible. Now, what else is there to be said?'

'Nothing, after you have given me the address of the undertakers you wish to employ.'

'I know none in London, nor, I am sure, does my mother. You will be more accustomed to such matters, and I should be obliged to you to act for us.'

'Very well,' said Doctor Haughton. 'I will give orders that the body be fetched from the tavern, where it is now lying, and brought here to-night. I will see you in a day or two; and I think you may trust to me for arranging

the business without any unpleasant legal inquiry, under which the facts might possibly come to light.'

Martin Gurwood shook hands with his retiring visitors, and followed them to the door, which he closed behind them and carefully locked. Then returning to the chair which he had occupied he fell on his knees beside it, and prayed long and fervently. He must have felt strong love for the man whose death and whose crime had just been revealed to him; the story just narrated must have struck deeply into his soul; for when he lifted his face from between his hands where it had been buried, it was strained, and seared, and tear-blurred.

What was to be done? The dreadful news must be kept from Mrs. Calverley as long as possible; not, as Martin well enough knew, that her feelings towards the dead man would be wounded as almost any other woman's feelings would be wounded by the disclosure; not that in her case it would involve any shattering of the idol, any revulsion of love long concen-

trated on one earthly object, and at the last finding itself betrayed; but in fear lest the woman's ungovernable temper should break forth and blurt out to the whole world the story of her wrongs, and of her husband's dishonour.

There was the other woman too, the poor wretch who had been the sharer of that dishonour, who had been living with a man on whom she had no moral or legal claim, and who even now was all unconscious of the blow which had fallen upon him, cutting him off in the midst of his wickedness, and leaving her to the scorn and reprobation of the world. Martin Gurwood's large-souled pity had time to turn even to this outcast. As he thought of her, he pictured to himself the desolation which would fall upon that little home, and could not help contrasting it with the proper and conventional display of mourning which had already commenced to reign in the house in which he sat.

Yes! Mourning as understood by undertakers and at *maisons de deuil*;—which is a very different thing from grief as displayed in

red eyelids and swollen cheeks, in numbed feelings and dumb carelessness as to all that may happen—had begun to reign in the mansion in Great Walpole-street. The blinds had all been drawn down, and the servants stole about noiselessly on tip-toe. It was felt to be a time when people required keeping up, and the butler had opened a bottle of John Calverley's particular Madeira, and the cook had announced her intention of adding something special to the ordinary supper fare. Mrs. Calverley had retired to her bed-room, and announced that she would see no one save Madame Du Tertre, who was to be shown up directly she returned. And about seven o'clock in the murky autumnal evening, there was a noise of wheels and a low knock, and It arrived, and was borne in its shell on men's shoulders up the creaking stairs to an unused room on the second-floor, where It was left alone. There It lay deserted by all; It that had been young John Calverley the worshipped treasure of the old mother long since passed away; It that had been the revered head of

the great City house of Calverley and Company of world-wide fame and never-tarnished renown ; It that had been ' dear old John,' so passionately loved by Alice Claxton, who was even now looking out into the dark night from her cottage-porch, and wondering whether her husband had gone off on business, or whether he would return.

Long before It was brought there, Mr. Jeffreys had arrived from the City ; and had an interview with Mr. Gurwood, in which he learned of his principal's sudden death. As Mr. Jeffreys came down the steps he met a lady going up ; a lady in a state of great excitement, and who asked the footman standing at the hall-door what had happened.

The footman was concise in his reply. ' Mr. Calverley is dead, mum,' he said. ' And Mrs. Calverley wished to see Madame Doo Turt as soon as possible.'

CHAPTER II.

A CONFIDENTIAL MISSION.

DURING the time that It was lying in the unused second-floor room awaiting its last dismal journey to Kensal Green, Martin Gurwood kept the story which had been told him locked in his own breast. Once or twice he saw Doctor Haughton, who had managed to set aside the impending inquest, and to him Martin spoke, hoping that either he or Mr. Broadbent might suggest the advisability of their communicating with the tenant of the cottage at Hendon, and letting her know what had occurred. But on this subject the astute physician was singularly reserved; and whenever there was any approach to it he invariably turned the current of the conversation. It was a shy subject, he thought, and one in

which grave men in his position should not be mixed up. They were men of the world, and knew that such things were; but both for professional and private reasons it was best to ignore them as far as possible.

So Martin Gurwood, left entirely to his own resources, almost gave himself up to despair. He felt that it would be impossible to conceal the truth from Mrs. Calverley much longer, but he knew that before mentioning it to her, he ought to possess himself of the details of the story, and these he could not learn without a personal visit to Hendon. Then, too, it was more than probable that this young woman, the dead man's mistress, was even yet ignorant of his fate, and out of mere Christian charity she ought to be made acquainted with it. Martin Gurwood did not know what to do. His worldly knowledge was small; such of it as he possessed had been acquired at Oxford, and immediately after leaving the university, and it had grown dull and rusty in his subsequent curacies and in the Lullington vicarage. If he had only a friend, a clear-

headed, far-seeing man of experience, to whom he could intrust the secret, and on whose judgment he could rely! Suddenly a bright thought occurred to him—Humphrey Statham—there was the very man. Sound, single-hearted, and worldly-wise. Martin had known him off and on for many years, and not merely in his own experience of him, which was small, had found in him all the qualities he had named, but had heard him accredited with them by others whose relations with Statham had been more intimate. He would go down into the City the very next day, and hunt him out. And Martin Gurwood went to bed that night with a sense of relief at his heart.

The month on board the Scilly pilot-boat had done Humphrey Statham an immense deal of good. Mr. Collins had carefully avoided troubling his master with any letters or papers; though even if they had been forwarded, it is doubtful whether they would have reached their destination, as the season had been very stormy, and the pilot's services

in constant requisition. Mr. Statham's spirits rose with the wind and the storm. Knowing the sea-going qualities of the boat beneath him, he was never so happy as when knocking about in heavy gales and foam-crested rollers. He had had a remarkably happy holiday, and had come back with renewed health and fresh vigour for business.

On the second morning after his return he was seated at his desk looking over some special papers which the vigilant Collins had placed before him, when that discreet functionary presented himself at the door.

'A gentleman to see you, sir,' he said; 'says his business is pressing. Here is his card.'

Mr. Statham took up the card, and glanced at it. 'The Reverend Martin Gurwood,' he cried; 'show him in at once. Why did you hesitate?'

'Beg your pardon, Mr. Statham, but these matters,' pointing to the papers on which Humphrey had been engaged, 'are important. Been bottled-up for a fortnight, and won't

keep any longer. Norland and Company, owners of the brig Samson, found derelict off Cuxhaven, are coming to see you at two; and Captain Thompson, of the barque Susquehanna, run into the fog of the ninth instant off Dungeness, has been here three times, and gets more and more impatient each visit.'

'Captain Thompson's patience must be yet farther tried, I am afraid, Collins; and Messrs. Norland must wait my leisure,' said Humphrey Statham. 'Show Mr. Gurwood in at once, and don't let me be disturbed while he is with me.'

Mr. Collins bowed, with a deprecatory shrug of the shoulders, and retired, speedily returning and ushering the visitor into his master's presence.

'My dear Gurwood,' cried Humphrey, as soon as they were alone, 'this is an unexpected pleasure! What an age it is since I have seen you! I am so glad I am in town; I only returned the day before yesterday.'

'Your trip, whatever it has been, seems

to have done you good,' said Martin. 'How strong and well you are looking!'

'I have been in a pilot-boat for the last three weeks—you know my old lunes—and had all the London dust blown out of me by strong gales and washed off me by running seas. I wish I could return the compliment, my dear fellow,' added Statham; 'but I'm sorry to see you doing no credit to Lullington air. You look as pallid and as sodden as any Londoner, Gurwood. What's the matter with you, man?'

'I have had a good deal of mental worry within the last few days, and I suppose I am showing its effects,' said Martin. 'It is this which has brought me to see you, to ask for any advice and assistance you can give me.'

'Sorry for the cause, but delighted to be of any use in my power,' said Statham. 'Is it in my line of business? Any of your stepfather's argosies run down and wrecked on their homeward voyage? By the way, a thousand pardons! What an idiot I am! I now remember to have seen in the *Times* a para-

graph announcing Mr. Calverley's sudden death.'

'It is in connection with that event that I have come to you. You are a man of the world, I know, and a thorough good fellow into the bargain, while in all matters requiring tact and decision I am lamentably deficient.'

'Merely the manner of bringing up, my good friend,' said Humphrey Statham. 'I am practical and hard-headed: you are theoretical and large-hearted. What the wine-merchants call a 'blending' of the qualities of both of us would make, I suppose, the right sort of fellow. Now, then, what has gone wrong? Mr. Calverley has died intestate, I suppose, or there is some hitch about the disposition of his property.'

'No, so far all is right. The will, made about two years ago, is clear, concise, and properly attested. I am joined in the executorship with Mrs. Calverley, and so far all is plain sailing. Besides, I have been mixed up with so many of my parishioners in such matters that I should scarcely have needed ad-

vice. What I have come about is a much more serious affair.'

'Out with it, then, man, and don't have any farther hesitation. You won't be able to astonish me. All sorts of wonderful things have been told me by people sitting in that chair. The last person who occupied it before I went away was a detective officer, and your story cannot be more strange than his, or more pathetically interesting—to me at least.' But the last words were almost inaudible.

'You must let me say what I have to say in my own way, then,' said Martin Gurwood, 'and try and follow me as best you can. It was given out that Mr. Calverley died in a railway carriage. This was not the case. He died in a fit on the high road to Hendon, and was found there by a London physician who knew him, and who happened to be passing in his carriage.'

'Hendon?' repeated Humphrey Statham. 'What have I heard about Hendon lately?'

'It is a place which has a good deal to do with the story I am about to relate,' said Mar-

tin, 'as you will judge when I tell you that the late Mr. Calverley, unknown to his wife or to any of us, had a house there.'

Humphrey Statham looked up sharply; then whistled long and low.

'A house to which he was in the habit of retiring every other fortnight or so, giving out and leaving it to be imagined that he had gone down to some ironworks which he had purchased in the North, and which required his frequent supervision.'

'Yes,' said Statham, nodding his head composedly, 'I quite understand. Of course at this country residence he didn't pass in his own name?'

'How in the world could you have guessed that?' said Martin, astonished. 'You are right, however. It seems that at Hendon he was known as Mr. Claxton.'

'Claxton!' cried Humphrey. 'Good Heavens! what an extraordinary thing!' Then checking himself, he repeated, 'Yes, known as Mr. Claxton.'

The name seems familiar to you; it is, I

suppose, not an uncommon one?' said Martin. 'However, by it he was known.'

'Yes,' said Humphrey Statham, absently. His thoughts were far away then, intent on Tatlow's story about Emily Mitchell's child and the lady who had adopted her. 'Yes,' he repeated, recalling his attention by an effort, 'I think I can see my way to some very awkward details. The man who passed as Claxton was not alone at this retreat?'

'He was not,' said Martin, looking uncomfortable. 'The cottage had, as I am informed, a young woman for its permanent mistress.'

'Exactly,' said Statham, 'as might have been anticipated.'

'Good Heavens!' cried Martin, in his turn, 'are such things so common that you take the revelation thus calmly? When this news was told me I was staggered beyond belief.'

'Perfectly natural in your case, my dear Gurwood,' said Humphrey Statham, who had resumed his old bearing and manner; 'had it been otherwise, you would not have been

fitted for the position you occupy. What you and other men call "knowledge of the world," with which you are pleased to accredit me, means an experience of the worst side of human nature, laughed at, and glossed over by the thoughtless, but often horrible in its abandonment and profligacy. Such knowledge is hardly earned, and, to a man of any refinement and decent feeling, is eminently unsatisfactory in its results; but it is what we most of us have to go through, and in such matters it is of no use being squeamish. Well, Mr. Calverley was known as Mr. Claxton in his Hendon home, which he shared with a young woman. Has Mrs. Calverley been made acquainted with this story?

'No; nor do I know how it is to be broken to her; that is one point on which I have to consult you. More than this, the—the person in question is, so far as I can make out, as yet unaware of what has transpired—I mean of Calverley's death.'

'The deuce she is! Has no one been to see her?'

‘No one at all. The whole thing transpired in a very odd manner. It appears that the Hendon apothecary happened to be in the carriage with the London physician, of whom I have spoken, and recognised the dead man as his acquaintance, Mr. Claxton.’

‘Then he was, of course, the very man of all others to tell this woman what had happened.’

‘So I thought, and hinted as much as strongly as I dared. But he declined to take the hint; nor would his companion, Doctor Haughton, the physician, help me out in my suggestion.’

‘This is very awkward,’ said Humphrey Statham, after a pause. ‘You see your great object must naturally be to keep the story of this disgraceful connection from Mrs. Calverley’s ears. She will have worry enough of her own, poor woman, without having her feelings harrowed by the discovery of her husband’s baseness.’

‘Yes,’ said Martin Gurwood, but he spoke faintly. Knowing his mother as he did, he

felt it impossible to indorse his friend's ideal description of her state.

‘Well, it seems to me more than probable that in a very short time this young woman of whom we have been speaking, believing, as I think you said she did, that the *soi-disant* Mr. Claxton was a partner in Calverley's firm, will be sending down to the house of business in the City to inquire what has become of him. If she does that, she would at once discover the true state of affairs, and then, if she be like the rest of her class, a row-royal will ensue.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Martin Gurwood, in alarm. ‘What do you think she will do?’

‘My good fellow, she will do everything she possibly can to make the best bargain for herself. Persons in her position generally imagine that this is best effected by creating a disturbance, and rendering themselves as obnoxious as possible. It is probable, therefore, that this woman will turn all her energies on to Mrs. Calverley, beginning by ex-

plaining to her the position, and proceeding to extort money.'

'I should scarcely think she would be able to do that where my mother is concerned,' said Martin Gurwood, finding it impossible to restrain a grim smile. 'Mrs. Calverley throughout her life has been a thorough woman of business, and would be quite able to hold her own in any matter of that kind. But it is most advisable that the recent state of affairs should be kept from her as long as possible, and that, when it is found necessary to disclose them, the story should be told with all possible delicacy.'

'Exactly; and with that feeling we musn't leave it to the young person at Hendon to do.'

'Of course not,' said Martin Gurwood. 'I really am distressed beyond measure. I have no notion what ought to be done, or who should do it.'

Humphrey Statham rose from his seat, plunged his hands into his trousers-pockets, and took two or three short sharp turns up

and down the room. Then he stopped in front of Martin Gurwood's chair, and said:

‘I'll tell you what it is: this matter will have to be faced out sooner or later, and it is better that it should be done at once. For your mother's sake, and for your own, it is necessary that there should be as little scandal as possible; and, so far as I can see, the only way to avoid an exposé is for some one to go up to Hendon and see this young woman.’

‘Yes,’ assented Martin Gurwood dolefully; ‘what a very unpleasant task!’

‘This must be done at once, before she gets an inkling of what has occurred, or else, as I say, she will be coming down to the City, and thence to Mrs. Calverley, and all our plans will be upset. Now, whoever sees her must tell her exactly what has happened, and— By the way, the will has been found, you say, and you have seen it?’

‘Certainly. I am one of the executors.’

‘And there is no provision made for—for Hendon in the will?’

‘None at all; there is no mention of, or allusion to, the subject.’

‘So much the better,’ said Humphrey Statham. ‘Men are so essentially selfish that, no matter what extravagance they may commit for those people during their lifetime, they seldom leave them anything at their death. If, however, they have any kind of feeling about them, they usually make some separate provision while they are alive, and do not risk the chance of having their memories mocked at by any testamentary acknowledgment of their frailties. Of course you know nothing of any settlement having been made by Mr. Calverley during his life?’

‘Nothing at all; neither the business nor the private accounts have yet been looked into.’

‘I should say, most likely nothing was done in that way. Mr. Calverley was not an old man, and up to the time of his death had not been ailing. He probably expected to live on for many years, and even if he intended to provide for this young person, did

not see any necessity for doing so at present. If this be the case, it is so far in our favour. We have something to gain from this young woman—her silence—and it must be purchased.'

'Yes,' said Martin Gurwood; 'I see the necessity for that, and I daresay it could be managed. It will be necessary to take Jeffreys, the chief clerk, into confidence, as he will have the preparation of the accounts.'

'Limited confidence to Jeffreys is not objectionable,' said Mr. Statham. 'Very well, then; this person can be told that so long as she conducts herself properly, and keeps her mouth shut in regard to her life at Hendon, she will receive a certain annuity, the amount of which can be determined upon hereafter. It'll stand you in, I should say, from a hundred to a couple of hundred a year; but you must get Mr. Jeffreys to arrange that for her; and if she holds to her share of the bargain, you may consider yourself well out of what might have been a very disagreeable affair.'

'I think so too, and I am very much

obliged to you for the advice. But there is one point on which I am as much in the dark as ever.'

'And that is—?'

'Who am I to get to go to Hendon to transact this business? Of course I should be very unwilling to go myself; but even if I could overcome my repugnance, I doubt whether I should be of the smallest use.'

'I am perfectly sure you would not; and even if you were likely to succeed, you must not be sent on a mission to make terms with a woman of this class. No; they say that if you want anything properly done you must do it yourself; and as I was the originator of this proposition, I suppose I must take upon myself to be its executant.'

'Do you mean to say you will take upon yourself to go to Hendon and do all this for me?'

'I suppose I must.'

'You are the best fellow in the world,' said Martin Gurwood, shaking his friend heartily by the hand.

‘No,’ said Statham, ‘I am very far from that. But I have wandered here and there, and seen men and cities — and women too, for that matter—and I daresay I shall do this better than any of your acquaintance. So, consider the matter settled, and leave it to me.’

‘When will you go to Hendon?’

‘To-morrow; and I will see you on the day following. Come here about this time, and you shall learn the result of my mission.’

‘I will do so. I never can be sufficiently grateful to you, Statham, for the kindness you have shown me in this matter.’ And Martin Gurwood took leave of his friend in a much more comfortable frame of mind than when he arrived that morning in Change-alley.

When Humphrey Statham was left by himself he remained perfectly quiet for a few minutes; then he rose from his chair, and resuming his quarter-deck-like patrolling of the room, plunged into thought, which found expression in the following words:

‘This is certainly a most extraordinary

complication of affairs. To think that Emily Mitchell's child should have been adopted by a woman who proves to be Mr. Calverley's mistress! The Yellow Flag waves over the poor little wretch betimes. However, it must be my business to put an end to that connection as speedily as possible, and I do not suppose there will be much difficulty. The child was all very well as an amusement, but now that the supplies are cut off, or, at all events, very much reduced, I should think madam would be only too glad to be rid of the encumbrance. Fancy such an affair as this happening with that remarkably respectable and quiet-looking old gentleman, Mr. Calverley! And having been carried on for several years too, without any one being one bit the wiser. Not a bad notion that, calling himself Claxton, and giving out that he was a sleeping partner with Calverley and Company, which would account for his being seen to go in there, and being recognised by the clerks and porters if any one had thought it worth

while to watch him from Hendon to the City. What a world it is! What a world of lies and swindling, dishonour and deceit! And here is Martin Gurwood creeping about round the edge of it, and knowing no more of what goes on within than a fly on a clock-face knows of the movement of the works! He would have made a nice mess of it if he had gone up to Hendon; for he is an earnest man according to his lights, and would probably have remonstrated with the young woman, and exhorted her to repentance; her comments on which proceeding would probably have been delivered in rather strong language, at which he, being naturally shocked, would have retired, and the whole thing would have fallen through.

‘Now let me see what I have got to do. In the first place, I must stipulate with the young woman that she must clear out of the place at Hendon as soon as possible. I dare-say there is the usual gimcrack tawdry furniture, which persons of her class think so elegant, but which will sell for a mere song.

But that's no business of mine, and all I can do is to make the annuity which we pay her contingent on her clearing out at once, on her good behaviour, and on her complete silence as regards Mr. Calverley. The most awkward part of the business I have undertaken is that breaking the news of the old gentleman's death. It's possible, but not very likely, that this poor creature may have some feelings of gratitude to him for the home he gave her, and the kindness he showed her; and if so, I shall be in a horribly unpleasant position. I never can stand tears or anything of that sort. Of course there is an element of roughness in what I have to say, however gently I may put it. I think the best plan will be for me to go to the place and try to get an interview with the young person without at first entering upon the subject of my visit. By that means I shall be enabled to take stock of her, and see which is the best way to approach the matter.

‘Now, what excuse can I make to get into the house? People of that sort, when they

are in luck, are apt to stand very much on their dignity, poor creatures! and to be tremendously exclusive. If I were to send in my name without announcing any business, I shouldn't be admitted. If I mentioned Calverley or Claxton, I should have to invent a story which would be bad, or to tell the truth, which would be worse. Now, how can I manage it?

He paused for a few moments, leaning against the mantelpiece. Then a sudden thought struck him.

'By Joye! Tatlow was up in that neighbourhood, and heard from his friend, the master of the workhouse, about this Mrs. Claxton, as she called herself. Perhaps, in the course of his inquiries he may have learned something which will give me a hint as to how I should act.'

He touched a spring-bell on the table. 'Collins,' he said, when that worthy appeared, 'I am at leisure now for a few minutes.'

'Glad to hear it, sir,' said Collins. 'Mr. George Norland is outside and getting very

savage at being kept awaiting. And as for the captain of the *Susquehanna*—'

'You can send Mr. Norland in as soon as you leave the room, and the captain of the *Susquehanna* as soon as he comes out, and any one else, to follow hot and hot, like chops. But, in the first place, telegraph to Scotland-yard, and ask Mr. Tatlow to step down to me this afternoon.'

By the time Mr. Tatlow arrived, Humphrey Statham had seen various impatient ship-brokers, and was tolerably exhausted with the business of the day.

'Just one word, Tatlow,' he said. 'I want to have a little talk with that lady of whom you spoke to me—she that lives at Hendon, and adopted the child. But, of course, I don't want to give my own name, or to let her have any hint of the object of my visit. What should you say, now, was the best line for me to take?'

'Charity, sir!' said Mr. Tatlow promptly; 'Mrs. Claxton goes in for that hot and heavy—so they told me down there; and if you

were to go as the agent of a society and pitch a good tale, she'd be sure to see you.'

'Poor creature!' said Humphrey Statham to himself, after the detective had departed. 'Charity, eh?—they frequently do that, I believe. It is the only way in which any remnant of good that may be left in them can find vent. Well, I'll make my first appearance as agent for a charity to-morrow afternoon.'

CHAPTER III.

A CHECK.

MR. CALVERLEY dead! The announcement, suddenly blurted out by the footman, so took Pauline by surprise that she literally staggered back two paces, and supported herself against the wall. Dead, on the very day, almost at the very hour when he had promised to meet her, when she had calculated on worming from him the secret which, once in her possession, she had intended to use as the means of extracting information about Tom Durham, and of putting her on to her fugitive husband's track. Dead! What was the meaning of it all? Was the mystery about this unknown man, this not-to-be-mentioned invisible partner, Claxton, of deeper importance than she had thought? Were Mr. Calverley, Claxton, and Tom Durham so in-

termixed with business transactions of such a nature that sooner than confess his connexion with them the senior partner had committed self-destruction? The thought flashed like lightning through Pauline's brain. But ere she had time to analyse it, the solemn voice of the footman repeated in its croaking tones:

‘Mrs. Calverley wishes to see Madame Doo Turt as soon as possible.’

‘Yes,’ said Pauline in reply, ‘I will go to Mrs. Calverley at once.’

Past the range of hat-pegs, where the dead man's coats and hats still hung; past the little study, through the open door of which she saw a row of his boots standing in order against the wall, his umbrella and walking-stick in ~~the~~ corner, his folded gloves and clothes-brush laid out upon the table; up the heavily-carpeted stairs; past the closed drawing-room door, and on to Mrs. Calverley's bedroom, at the door of which she knocked. Bidden to come in, Pauline entered, and found the widow seated prim and upright, in a high-backed chair, before the fire.

‘This is sad news, my dear friend,’ commenced Pauline, in a sympathetic voice; ‘this is a frightful calamity.’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Calverley coldly, ‘it is very hard upon me, but not more than I have always expected. Mr. Calverley chose never to live in his own home, and he has finished by dying out of it.’

‘I have heard no particulars,’ said Pauline. ‘Where did the sad event take place?’

‘Mr. Calverley was found dead in a railway carriage, as he was returning from those ironworks,’ said the widow, with vicious emphasis on the last word. ‘He entered into that speculation against my will, and he has now reaped the reward of his own obstinacy.’

Pauline looked at her curiously. The dread event which had occurred had not softened Mrs. Calverley in the slightest degree.

‘This is very, very sad,’ said Pauline, after a pause. ‘If I were to consult my own feelings, I should withdraw, and leave you to your overwhelming grief, which no attention can solace, and which must run its course; and yet

I cannot bear to think of you alone and unaided. What would you wish me to do?’

‘You had much better stay,’ said Mrs. Calverley, shortly. ‘I feel myself quite unequal to anything, and there is a great deal to be done.’

The tone in which these words were uttered was cold, peremptory, and unpleasant; but Pauline took no notice of it. She had a great deal to think over, and would take the first opportunity of arranging her plans. As it was, she busied herself in seeing to Mrs. Calverley’s comfort. She had long since relieved her of the superintendence of domestic affairs, and now she made suggestions for an interview with the milliner, for the ordering of the servants’ mourning, and for the general conduct of the household, in all of which the widow coldly acquiesced.

Then, so soon as she could, Pauline sought the privacy of her room, and gave herself up to meditation.

‘Was there ever anything so unfortunate,’ she thought to herself, as, having changed her

neat French walking-boots for slippers, in order not to be heard by Mrs. Calverley in the room beneath, she commenced pacing up and down the floor,—‘was there ever anything so unfortunate! By this man’s death my whole position is changed! Not that I think there is any doubt of stability of my interest in this house. Though it was he that first suggested that I should come here, I have so strengthened myself since then, I stand so well with the wretched creature down-stairs, the woman with a heart like a dried pea, that had he lived and tried to bring his influence to bear against me, it would have been unavailing. I had better stay,’ she thought. ‘Housekeeper, dame de compagnie, drudge even, if she could make me so, and all for my board and lodging. Well, it is worth my while to remain for that, even now, though by this man’s death my chief purpose in coming here is defeated. In the dead man I have lost, not merely my first friend and patron, but one whom I had intended should be my victim, and who alone could serve me in the matter dearest to my

heart. To all left here now that rascally husband of mine was unknown. Even of the name of Tom Durham they have only heard since the account of his supposed death appeared in the newspapers. The clue is lost just when I had my hand upon it! And yet I may as well remain in this place, at all events until I see how matters progress. There is nowhere I could go to on the chance of hearing any news, —unless, indeed, I could find the agent who signed that letter which Monsieur mon mari gave me the day we were at Southampton. He or she, whichever it may be, would know something doubtless, but whether they would tell it is another matter. For the present, then, here I stay. The house will not be so dull as it was before, for these eccentric English people, ordinarily so triste and reserved, seem to excite themselves with deaths and funerals; and now this priest, this Monsieur Gurwood, who was on the point of going away, will have to remain to attend to the affairs, and to be a comfort to his sorrowing mother. I am much mistaken if there is not something

to be made out of Monsieur Gurwood. He is sly and secretive, and will hide all he knows; but my power of will is stronger than his; and if, under these altered circumstances, he learns anything which may interest me, I shall be able to get it from him.'

Mrs. Calverley remained in her room that evening, occupying herself in writing up her diary, which she had scrupulously kept for many years, and in comparing her record of the feelings which she imagined she ought to have experienced, and which was very different from what she really did experience, with the entry in a previous diary of a dozen years ago, on the day of George Gurwood's death. She had had a second interview with Madame Du Tertre, and had talked over the arrangements of the milliner, and had discussed the advisability of a short run to Brighton, or some other lively place—it must be a lively place at such a wintry season—for change of air and scene. And she had made a very fair meal, which had been sent up to her on a tray from the dinner-table below, at which Martin Gurwood

and Pauline were seated, solemnly facing each other.

The presence of the butler at this repast, always annoying to a man of Martin Gurwood's simple habits, was on this occasion perfectly unendurable ; and, after requesting his companion's assent, he instructed the domestic to retire, telling him they would wait upon themselves.

'I thought you would not mind it, Madame Du Tertre,' he said, with a grave bow, after the man had withdrawn. 'At a time when one is irritable, and one's nerves are disturbed, it is beyond measure annoying to me to have a person looking on, watching your every mouthful, and doing nothing else.'

'I am most thankful that you sent the servant away, Monsieur Gurwood,' said Pauline, 'more especially as I could not speak to you in his presence, and I am anxious to learn full particulars of what has occurred.'

Why did Martin Gurwood's pale face become suffused with a burning red? What was

there, Pauline thought, in her observation to make him evince such emotion?

‘I scarcely know that I am in a position to give you any information, as all I know myself is learned at secondhand.’

‘Anything will be information to me,’ said Pauline, ‘as all Mrs. Calverley told me was the bare fact. You have never been to—what is the place called—Swartmoor, I suppose?’

‘No, never,’ said Martin Gurwood, with increased perturbation, duly marked by Pauline. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘I merely wanted to know whether it was an unhealthy place, as this poor man seems to have caught his death there.’

‘Mr. Calverley died from heart-disease, brought on by mental worry and excitement.’

‘Ah,’ said Pauline; ‘poor man!’ And she thought to herself, ‘that mental worry and excitement were caused by his knowledge that he had to encounter me, and to tell me the true story—for he was too dull to devise any fiction which I should not have been able to detect—of his dealings with this Claxton.’

After a pause she said : 'These worries sprung from his intense interest in his business, I suppose, Monsieur Gurwood?'

'I—I should imagine so,' said Martin, flushing again. 'Mr. Calverley was devoted to business.'

'Yes,' said Pauline, looking straight at him. 'I often wondered he did not give himself more relaxation; did not confide the conduct of his affairs more to his subordinates, or at least to his partner.'

The shot told. All the colour left Martin Gurwood's face, and he looked horridly embarrassed as he said, 'Partner, Madame Du Tertre? Mr. Calverley had no partner.'

'Indeed,' said Pauline calmly, but keeping her eyes fixed on his face; 'I thought I understood that there was a gentleman whose name was not in the firm, but who was what you call a sleeping partner, Mr.—Mr. Claxton.'

'There is no such name in the house,' said Martin Gurwood, striving to master his emotion. 'From whom did you hear this, madame—not from my mother?'

‘O, no,’ said Pauline calmly; ‘I think it was from Mr. Calverley himself.’

‘You must surely be mistaken, Madame Du Tertre.’

‘It is more than probable, monsieur,’ said Pauline. ‘In my ignorance of the language I may have mistaken the terms which Mr. Calverley used, and given them my own misinterpretation. Ah, and so there is no one of the name of Claxton; or if there be, he is not a partner? So, as far as being able to relieve Mr. Calverley was concerned, it came to the same thing. Of course with a man so precise, all the business arrangements, what you call the will and those things, were properly made?’

‘O, yes; all in strict order,’ said Martin, grateful for the change of subject. ‘Mr. Jeffreys went from hence to the lawyer’s, and has since been back with a copy of the will. With the exception of a few legacies, all the property is left to Mrs. Calverley, and she and I are appointed joint executors.’

‘That is as it should be,’ said Pauline, ‘and what might have been expected from a man

like Mr. Calverley. Just, upright, and honourable, was he not?’

‘I always believed him to be so, madame,’ said Martin, with an effort.

‘And his death was as creditable as his life,’ pursued Pauline, with her eyes still fixed upon her companion. ‘He was killed in the discharge of his business, and no soldier dying on the battle-field could have a more honourable death. You agree with me, Monsieur Gurwood?’

‘I do not give much heed to the kind of death which falls to the lot of men, but rather to the frame of mind in which they die.’

‘And even there, monsieur, you must allow that Mr. Calverley was fortunate. Respected by his friends, and beloved by his wife, successful in his business, and happy in his home—’

‘Yes,’ interrupted Martin Gurwood, ‘but it is not for us to pronounce our judgment in these matters, Madame Du Tertre, and you will excuse me if I suggest that we change the subject.’

When dinner was finished Pauline went up-stairs again to Mrs. Calverley's room, and had another long chat with the widow before she retired to rest. Mrs. Calverley had been made acquainted with the fact that It had arrived, and her son had suggested her visiting the chamber where It lay. But she had decided upon postponing this duty until the next day, and sat with Pauline, moaning over the misfortunes which had happened to her during her lifetime, and so thoroughly enjoying the recital of her woes that her companion thought she would never cease, and was too glad to take her leave for the night at the first opportunity which offered itself.

Once more in the safety and solitude of her own chamber she resumed her meditation.

'That was a safe hit that I made at dinner, or the priest would not have changed colour like a blushing girl. This reverend's face is like a sheet of plate-glass—one can see straight through it down into his heart. Not into every corner, though. There are recesses where he puts away things which he wishes

to hide. In one of them lies some secret of his own. That I guessed as soon as I saw him; and now there is, in addition to that, another which will probably be much more interesting to me, as it relates in some way, I imagine, to the business in which Claxton is mixed up. It must be so, I think, for his tell-tale colour came and went as I mentioned the partnership and that man's name. Now, how am I to learn more from him on that point? He is uneasy when allusion is made to it in conversation, and tries to change the subject, and it is plain that Mrs. Calverley knows nothing at all about it. Mr. Gurwood, too, is evidently desirous that his mother should not know, as he betrayed such anxiety in asking me whether it was from her I had heard mention of the partnership. And there is not another soul to whom I can turn with the chance of hearing any tidings of Tom Durham.

‘Stay, what did this man say about being appointed joint executor with his mother? In that case he will remain here for yet some

time, and all the dead man's papers will pass into his hands. Such of them as are not entirely relating to the business will be brought to this house, and I shall have perhaps the opportunity of seeing them. In them I may discover something which will give me a clue, some hint as to why Claxton obtained the agency for Tom Durham, and on what plea he asked for it. That is all I can hope to learn. About the two thousand pounds and the pale-faced woman, this man who is dead knew nothing. I must glean what I can from such papers as I can get hold of, and I must keep a careful watch upon the movements of my friend the reverend.'

On the following morning, Mrs. Calverley remaining in bed to breakfast, and Pauline being in friendly attendance on her, it suddenly occurred to the widow that she should like to know the contents of the drawers in the writing-table used by her deceased husband in his City office.

'I have always been of opinion,' she said to Pauline, after mentioning this subject, 'that

some extraordinary influence must have been used to induce Mr. Calverley to go into that speculation of the ironworks, and I think that very likely we may find some papers which will throw a light upon the matter.'

Pauline's eyes brightened as she listened. Perhaps the mysterious Mr. Claxton was mixed up with the speculation; or the drawers might contain other documents which might lead to a solution of his identity. But she answered cautiously.

'It may be as you say, madame. Shall I step down and ask Monsieur Martin to be good enough to go to the office and search the desk on your behalf?'

'Nothing of the sort,' said Mrs. Calverley shortly. 'This is a private matter in which I do not choose to ask my son's assistance. You are good enough to act as my confidential friend, Madame Du Tertre,' she added, with the nearest possible approach to softness in her manner, 'and I wish you to represent me on this occasion.'

Pauline took up the hard thin hand that

lay on the coverlet, and raised it to her lips. 'I will do anything you wish, my dear friend,' she murmured, scarcely knowing how to conceal her delight.

'In the top right-hand drawer of the dressing-table you will find Mr. Calverley's bunch of keys,' said the widow. 'One of them opens his office desk. If you will give me my blotting-book I will write a few lines to Mr. Jeffreys, authorising you to have access to the room. Once there, you will know what to look for.'

An hour afterwards Pauline walked into the offices at Mincing-lane. Signs of mourning were there in the long strips of wood, painted black, which were stuck up in front of the windows; in the unwonted silence which reigned around, the clerks working noiselessly at their desks, and the business visitors closing the doors softly behind them, and lowering their voices as though in the presence of Death, the messengers and porters abstaining from the jokes and whistling with which they usually seasoned their work.

Pauline was shown into the little glazed room, already familiar to her, and was speedily joined by the head-clerk, to whom she handed Mrs. Calverley's note. After reading it Mr. Jeffreys hesitated, but only for an instant. From his boyhood he had been brought up by Mr. Calverley, had served him for thirty years with unswerving fidelity, and had loved him as deeply as his unsentimental business nature would permit. In his late master's lifetime no request of Mrs. Calverley's, unendorsed by her husband, would have had the smallest weight with the head-clerk. But Mr. Calverley was no longer the chief of the house; no one knew how matters would turn out, or into whose hands the business would fall; and Mr. Jeffreys had understood from Messrs. Pembertons, the lawyers, that Mrs. Calverley was appointed as executrix, and knew that it would be as well for him to secure a place in her favour. So taking a key from his pocket he requested the visitor to follow him, and ushered her up the stairs into the room on the first floor.

There it was, with the exception of the absence of the central figure, exactly as she had last seen it. There stood his desk, the blotting-pad scribbled with recent memoranda, the date-index still showing the day on which he had last been there, the pen-rack, the paper—all the familiar objects, as though awaiting his return. Mr. Jeffreys walked to the window and pulled up the blind; then looked round the room, and in spite of himself, as it were, heaved a deep sigh.

‘It is Mrs. Calverley’s wish, madam, I see,’ he said, referring to the letter which he held in his hand, ‘that you should be left alone. If you should require any assistance or information from me, and will sound this bell,’ he pointed to the spring-bell on the table, which his master had used for summoning him, and him alone, ‘I shall be in the next room, and will wait upon you at once.’ Then he bowed and retired.

Left to herself, and certain that the door was safely closed, Pauline took the bunch of keys from her pocket, and soon hit upon the

one she required. One by one the drawers lay open before her; some almost empty, some packed to the brim, most of them with a top layer of dust, as though their contents had been undisturbed for years. What did she find in them? An assemblage of odds and ends, a collection of papers and written documents, of printed prospectuses of stock-jobbing companies, some of which had never seen the light, while others had perished in their speedily-blossomed maturity years ago. One contained a set of red-covered domestic account-books, neatly tied together with red tape, and on examining these Pauline found them to be the receipted books of the butcher, baker, &c., 'in account with Mr. John Calverley, 48 Colebrook-row, Islington,' and referring to a period when the dead man was only a struggling clerk, and lived with his old mother in the suburbs. In another lay scores of loose sheets of paper covered with his manuscript notes and calculations, the first rough draft of his report on the affairs of Lorraine Brothers, the stepping-stone to

the position which he had afterwards occupied.

But amongst all the papers written and printed there was no allusion to the Swartmoor Ironworks, no reference to what concerned Pauline more nearly, the name of Claxton; and she was about to give up the search in despair, and to summon Mr. Jeffreys for his farewell, when in moving she touched something with her foot, something which lay in the well of the desk covered by the top and flanked on either side by the two nests of drawers. At first she thought it was a footstool, but stooping to examine it, and bringing it to the light, she found it to be a small wooden box, clamped with iron at the edges, and closed with a patent lock. The key to this lock was on the bunch in her possession; in an instant she had the box on the desk, had opened it, and was examining its contents.

‘Of no value to any one but their owner.’ The line which she had seen so often in the advertisement sheets of English newspapers rang in Pauline’s mind as she turned over

what had been so jealously guarded. A miniature portrait on ivory of an old gray-haired woman in a lace cap with long falling lap-pets, and a black silk dress; a folded piece of paper containing a long lock of silky white hair, and a written memorandum, 'Died April 13th, 1858;' two newspaper cuttings, one announcing the death of Mrs. Calverley, of Colebrook-row, Islington, at the date just mentioned; the other the marriage of John Calverley, Esq., with Jane, widow of the late George Gurwood, Esq., and only daughter of John Lorraine, Esq., of Mincing-lane and Brunswick-square. Then Pauline came upon a packet of letters stained and discoloured with age, which on examination proved to have been written to him by his mother at various dates, while he was absent travelling on the business of the firm.

And nothing else. That box seemed to have been used by the dead man as a sacred depository for the relics of the old woman whom he had loved with such filial tenderness, whose memory he had so fondly cher-

ished. Stay! Here was something else, an envelope cleaner, fresher, and of newer shape than the others. She took it out and opened it eagerly. Ah, at last! It contained a half-sheet of note paper, on which were these words:

‘October 4, ’70. Transferred to private account two thousand pounds. To be given to T. D. at request of A. C.’

She had found something, then—not much, but something. T. D. was, of course, Tom Durham, and the A. C. at whose request the money was to be paid to him was equally, of course, Mr. Claxton. She had never heard his Christian name; it must be Albert, Alfred, Andrew, or something of the kind.

Pauline replaced the paper in the envelope, which she put into her pocket. No need to tell Mrs. Calverley anything about that—that was her prize! It contained no reference to the Swartmoor Ironworks, and would have no interest for the widow. So she locked the box, and replaced it in its former position under the desk, pressed the spring bell (the

familiar sound of which made Mr. Jeffreys jump off his chair), thanked the chief-clerk on his appearance, and took leave of him with much suavity. Then she took a cab, and returning straight to Great Walpole-street, reported to Mrs. Calverley the total failure of her mission.

There is bustle and confusion in Great Walpole-street, for the time has arrived when it is to be removed. At the Oxford Arms, intersecting Horatio-street, the hearse and the mourning-coaches have been drawn up for some time, and the black-job gentlemen are busying themselves, some in fixing plumes to the horses' heads, while others are getting out the trappings, staves, hat-bands, and other horrible insignia of their calling. Then, the cold fowls and sherry having been consumed by the mourners, the dismal procession files off to Kensal Green. Whence, in less than a couple of hours, it comes rattling back with some of the occupants of its carriages laughing, and all of them talking—all save Martin Gurwood, who, in addition to

his real grief at the loss of the dead man, is thinking that about that time Humphrey Statham has gone on his mission to the cottage at Hendon.

CHAPTER IV.

TAKE HER UP TENDERLY.

THE blinds are up at the house in Great Walpole-street, some of the windows have been open to get rid of the prevalent 'stuffiness,' and after the late melancholy week a general reaction towards sprightliness has set in among the household. This is confined to the lower regions, of course; up-stairs Mrs. Calverley, to whom the astute French milliner, aided and abetted by the counsel of Pauline, has actually given something like shape, sits full dressed and complacent, reading the letters of condolence which arrive by every post, and listening to the loud rings which precede the leaving of cards and the making of kind inquiries. Pauline is very attentive to her friend, listening patiently, now to her querulous com-

plaints as to the hardness of her fate, now to her childish delight at being the object of so many sympathetic letters and calls ; she is unwearied in her endeavours to amuse Mrs. Calverley, and she succeeds so well that that worthy lady has given up her intention of visiting Brighton, which would not at all have coincided with Pauline's plans.

For, on farther thinking over the subject, she has become more and more convinced that Martin Gurwood is in possession of some secret regarding Mr. Calverley's death, and she cannot divest herself of the idea that this secret has some bearing on the matter which she has nearest at heart—the identification of Claxton, as a means to the discovery of Tom Durham. The reverend is preoccupied now, and even graver than usual. If she could only induce this old woman to let her have a little time to herself, she could watch where he goes to ! Now, at this very minute, on the morning after the funeral, the servant is brushing Mr. Gurwood's hat in the hall, and he is about to start on some expedition which

might perhaps have as much interest for her as for him.

Unconscious of the excitement he was causing to his mother's visitor, Martin Gurwood sallied forth and walked down Great Walpole-street in quest of a cab to take him to the City. The good-looking young clergyman, handsome despite his grave and somewhat ascetic appearance, was an object of much remark. The nursery-maids, who were convoying their little charges to scamper about Guelph-park, were in some instances outspoken in their admiration of him. The people hiding behind the wire-blinds in the physician's dining-room, waiting their turn for an audience, looked out with envy at his trim figure and brisk activity, and turned back in disgust to refresh themselves with the outside sheet of the *Times*, or to stare with feeble curiosity at their fellow-victims. But, however bright may have been his personal appearance, it is certain that he was in a state of great mental disquietude, and when he ascended the dingy stairs leading to Hum-

phrey Statham's office his heart was beating audibly.

Mr. Collins was a man who never repeated a mistake; so that when he caught sight of Martin he gave him precedence over the business people who were waiting in the outer office, and showed him at once into Mr. Statham's sanctum.

Humphrey was not at his desk; he had pulled his arm-chair in front of the fire and was reclining in it, his feet stretched out on the fender, his hands plunged in his trousers-pockets. So deep in rumination was he that he did not look up at the opening of the door, but thinking it was merely Collins with some business question, waited to be spoken to.

'Asleep?' said Martin Gurwood, bending over him, and touching him lightly on the shoulder.

'What, is it you?' cried Humphrey, starting up. 'Asleep, no! but, I confess, perfectly rapt and engrossed in thought.'

'And the subject was—?'

'Exactly the subject which you have come

to talk to me about. Ah, my dear fellow, I have had the most extraordinary time since I saw you.'

'You have been to Hendon?'

'Yes; I went yesterday.'

'And you saw this young woman?'

'I did.'

'Well, what is she like? Does she agree? What terms did you offer her?'

'Stay, it is impossible for me to answer all your questions at once. You must let me tell my story my own way, while you sit there, and don't interrupt me. Yesterday morning I drove out to Hendon in a hansom cab, and while the driver was pulling up for refreshment I made my way to Rose Cottage, where I had been told Mrs. Claxton lived. Such a pretty place, Gurwood! Even in this wretched weather one could not fail to understand how lovely it must be in summer time, and even now how trim and orderly it was! I walked round and round it before I could make up my mind to ring the bell—I must tell you I had already arranged in my mind

a little plot for representing myself as deeply interested in some charity for which I intended to request her aid—but the place looked so different to what I had expected, so cosy and homely, that I hesitated about entering it under a false pretence, even though I knew my motive to be a good one. However, at last I made up my mind and pulled the bell. It was answered by a tidy, pleasant-faced, middle-aged woman. I asked if Mrs. Claxton were at home, and she answered yes, but doubted whether I could see her, inviting me at the same time to walk in while she took my message to her mistress. And then she ushered me into what was the dining-room, I suppose—all dark-green paper and black oak furniture, and some capital-proofs on the wall; and as I was mooning about and staring at everything, the door opened, and a lady came into the room.'

'A lady?' echoed Martin involuntarily.

'I said a lady, and I meant it, and I hold to the term,' said Humphrey Statham, looking straight at him. 'I don't know what her

birth and breeding may have been—I should think both must have been good—but I never saw a more perfectly lady-like or a sweeter manner.'

'What is the character of her personal appearance?' asked Martin coldly.

'You mean what is she like to look at, I suppose?' said Statham. 'Quite young, not more than two or three and twenty, I should think, with a slight girlish figure, and a bright, healthy, wholesome face. You know what I mean by wholesome—beaming hazel eyes, clear red-and-white complexion, sound white teeth, and in her eyes a look of frank honesty and innocence which should be her passport through the world.'

'She will stand in need of some such recommendation, poor girl,' said Martin, shaking his head.

'I am not at all sure about that,' said Humphrey, energetically; 'certainly not so much as you think. You wait until I have told you all about it, and I shall be greatly surprised if you are not of my opinion in the

matter. Let me see, where was I? O, she had just come into the room. Well, I rose on her entrance, but she very courteously motioned me to my seat again, and asked me my business. I confess, at that moment I felt like a tremendous impostor; I had not been the least nervous before, as, with such a woman as I had expected to meet, I could have brazened it out perfectly; but this was a very different affair. I felt it almost impossible to tell even a white lie to this quiet little creature. However, I blundered out the story I had concocted as best I could, and she listened earnestly and attentively. When I stopped speaking she told me that her means were not very large, but that she would spare me as much as she could. She took out her purse, but I thought that was a little too much, so I muttered something about having no receipt with me, and told her it would be better for her to send her subscription to the office. I thought I might as well learn a little more; so I introduced Mr. Claxton's name, suggesting, I think, that he should interest

some of his City friends in the charity; but her poor little face fell at once. Mr. Claxton was away, she said, travelling on business, and she burst into tears. I was very nearly myself breaking down at this, but she recovered herself quickly, and begged me to excuse her. Mr. Claxton was not in good health, she said, at the time of his departure, and as she had not heard from him since, she could not help being nervous.'

'This is very dreadful,' said Martin Gurwood, covering his face with his hand.

'Ah, but if you had only seen her,' said Humphrey; 'her pale wistful face, her large eyes full of tears! I declare I very nearly dropped the mask and betrayed myself. I asked her if Mr. Claxton were well known on the line on which he was travelling, suggesting that, if that were the case, and he had been taken ill, some one would surely have written to her. But she didn't seem to know where he had gone, and she did not like to make any inquiries. Mr. Claxton was, she said, a partner in the firm of Calverley and

Company of Mincing-lane, and she had thought of going down there to make inquiries concerning him. But she remembered that some time ago Mr. Claxton had warned her in the strongest manner against ever going to the City house, or taking notice to any one of his absence, however prolonged it might be. It was one of the laws of business, she supposed, she said, with a faint smile; but she had now become so nervous that she was very nearly breaking it.'

'That is precisely the catastrophe which we have been trying to avert,' said Martin.

'And which we shall certainly not be able to avert in the manner we originally intended,' said Humphrey Statham.

'The story grows blacker as you proceed with it,' said Martin, looking uneasily at his companion. 'From all I gather from you, it seems evident that—this—'

'This lady,' said Mr. Statham, almost sternly.

'Certainly; this lady is quiet, sensible, and well-behaved.'

‘More than that,’ said Humphrey eagerly. ‘After I left her, I had my luncheon at the inn. I dropped in at the little post-office and stationer’s shop; I chatted with half a dozen people about Mrs. Claxton, and from one and all I heard the same story, that she is kind-hearted, charitable, and unceasing in doing good; that she is the vicar’s right hand among the school-children, and that she is a pattern wife.’

‘Wife!’ echoed Martin Gurwood; ‘do you you mean to say—’

‘I mean to say, Martin Gurwood,’ said Statham, bending forward and speaking in a deep earnest voice, ‘that I have not the smallest doubt that the woman of whom we are speaking was married to the man whom you buried yesterday. I mean to say that at this instant she believes herself to be his wife, and that it will be next to impossible to make her understand the awful position in which she is placed. I mean to say that she is the victim of as black a fraud as ever was perpetrated, and that—there, I won’t say any more;

the man's dead, and we have all need of forgiveness.'

'The Lord help her in her trouble!' said Martin Gurwood solemnly, bowing his head. 'If what you say is right, and I feel it is, the mystery of the double name is now made clear.'

'Yes,' said Statham; 'had this lady been what we originally supposed, it is probable that he would not have given himself the trouble of inventing any such mystery; but being, as she fondly imagined herself, his wife, it was necessary to give her a name by which she might pass unrecognised by any of his friends who might accidentally come across her. The whole scheme must have been deliberately concocted, and with its association of Claxton as a partner in Calverley's house is diabolically ingenious.'

There was silence for a few moments, broken by Martin Gurwood. 'The question comes back to us again,' he said; 'what are we to do?'

'It comes back,' said Humphrey; 'but this

time I have no hesitation as to how it should be answered. When we last entered into this subject, after long discussion we decided that the inhabitant of Rose Cottage must be informed of what had taken place, and that an annuity must be offered her on condition of her keeping the knowledge of her position and even her existence from Mrs. Calverley. Now, part of our programme must be held to, and part abandoned.'

'It is our duty, I imagine, to break to her what has occurred,' said Martin.

'And to do so without a day's delay,' said Humphrey. 'That is necessary for our own sake as well as for hers. I did my best to impress upon her the inadvisability of her going to the house in the City; but as each day passes and no news is heard of him whom she awaits, her anxiety will increase more and more, and there is no knowing what rash step she may take.'

'Of course, if she went to Mincing-lane, she would learn at once that no Mr. Claxton was known there, and that Mr. Calverley was

dead. Putting the two facts together, she would at once understand what had occurred.'

'Ay, and she would not be long in realising her own position, poor thing; for of course she would hear of Mrs. Calverley, and then nothing could be kept from her. No, to such a woman the horrible truth blurted out in that way might prove fatal; and though to die might possibly be the best thing that could happen to her, we must do our best to prevent any such calamity. The truth must be told to her, but it must be told kindly and gently, and it must be pointed out to her that as she has sinned unwittingly, she will not be condemned.'

'Is she to be told that?' cried Martin Gurood. 'If whoever breaks the news to her talks to her after that fashion, he will be right if he is alluding to the divine mercy, but can he say the same to the world? Will not the world condemn her, point at her the finger of scorn, bid her not darken its respectable doors? Will not women priding themselves on their goodness and their charity take delight in hunt-

ing her down, and withdrawing themselves from the contamination of her presence? Will she not henceforth, and for the rest of her life, lie under a ban, be kept apart, sent to Coventry, have to perform social quarantine, and to keep the Yellow Flag flying to warn all who approach her of the danger they run?"

Humphrey Statham looked at his companion with surprise. He had never seen him so animated before. 'You are right,' he said. 'Heaven help her! it is the penalty which she will have to pay for this man's sin, in which no one will believe that she did not participate. There are thousands who will be ready to speak pityingly of him, while their hearts will be closed against her. Such is the justice of the world.'

'It must be our task, provided all that you imagine turns out to be true,' said Martin, 'to endeavour to alleviate her position as much as possible.'

'As a relative of the dead man who has worked this wrong, and as a clergyman, your influence and example can do her more good

than those of any other person. Except, perhaps, Mrs. Calverley,' added Statham, after a pause, 'who, I hope, for more reasons than one, will never know anything of Mrs.—Mrs. Claxton's existence.'

'All that I can do, I will do most earnestly,' said Martin.

'You must do something more, Martin Gurwood,' said Humphrey; 'you must go to Hendon to-morrow and break the news to this poor creature.'

'I!' cried Martin Gurwood; 'it is impossible—I—'

'You, and no one else,' said Humphrey. 'In the first place you are more accustomed than I am to such deeply painful scenes as that which will ensue. It is fitting that the words which you will have to say to her should come from the mouth of a man like you, a servant of God, keeping himself unspotted from the world, rather than from any of us who are living this driving, tearing, work-a-day life.'

Martin Gurwood was silent for a few mo-

ments, his eyes fixed on the ground; then he said with a shudder, 'I cannot do it. I feel I cannot do it.'

'O yes, you can, and you will,' said Humphrey, touching him kindly on the shoulder.

'Shall I have to tell her—all?'

'The all is unfortunately simple enough. You will have to tell her that so far as she was concerned, the life of this man who has just passed away was a fraud and a pretence; that his name was not Claxton, but Calverley; that he was not her husband, for at the very time when he, as she thought, made her his wife, he was married to another woman. You will have to expose all his baseness and his treachery; and you will find that she will speak pityingly of him, and forgive him, as women always do forgive those who ruin them body and soul.'

'You think they do?' said Martin Gurwood, looking at him earnestly.

'I know it,' said Statham. 'But that is neither here nor there. You must undertake this duty, Martin, for it lies more in your pro-

vince than in mine. If my original notion had proved correct, I could have assumed the requisite amount of sternness, and should have done very well ; but as matters stand at present I should be quite out of my element. It is meant for you, Martin, and you must do it.'

'I will do my best,' said Martin, 'though I shudder at the task, and greatly fear my own powers in being able to carry it through. Am I to say anything about the annuity, as we settled before?'

'No, I think not,' said Humphrey Statham promptly; 'that is a part of the affair which need not be touched on just yet; and when it comes to the front, I had better take it in hand. Not that you would not deal with it with perfect delicacy, but it requires a little infusion of business, which is more in my way. You are perfectly certain you are right in what you told me the other day about the will? No mention of any one who could possibly be this lady whom we know as Mrs. Claxton?'

'None. Every person named in the will is known to me or to my mother.'

‘Have you been through Mr. Calverley’s private papers?’

‘I have gone through most of them; they were not numerous, and were very methodically arranged.’

‘And you have found nothing suspicious in them, no memorandum making provision for any one?’

‘Nothing of the kind. But last night Mr. Jeffreys brought up to me the banker’s pass-book of the firm, and I noticed that about four months ago a sum of two thousand pounds was transferred from the business account to Mr. Calverley’s private account, and I thought that was remarkable.’

‘It was, and to have noticed it does you credit. I had no idea you had so much business discrimination.’

‘You have not heard all,’ said Martin. ‘On my pointing this out to Mr. Jeffreys, of course without hinting what idea had struck me, he told me that three or four years ago, he could not recollect the exact date off-hand, a very much larger sum, ten thousand pounds,

in fact, had been transferred from one account to the other in the same way.'

'Then it seems pretty clear to me,' said Humphrey Statham, 'that we shall not have to tax our inventive faculties, or to bewilder Mr. Jeffreys with any mysterious story for the purpose of furnishing Mrs. Claxton with proper means of support.'

'You imagine this money was devoted to her service?' asked Martin.

'I have very little doubt about it. The ten thousand pounds were no doubt set aside and invested in some safe concern, yielding a moderate rate of interest, say five or six per cent, and settled upon her. From this she would have a decent yearly income, more than enough, if I may judge from what I saw of her yesterday, to keep her in comfort. I don't know what the two thousand pounds transferred recently can have been for, unless it was that Mr. Calverley found his health beginning to fail, and desired to make a larger provision for her.'

'Might not this second sum have been

given as a bribe to some one?' asked Martin, 'for the sake of buying somebody's silence—some one who discovered what was going on, and threatened to reveal it?'

'Most assuredly it might,' said Statham, in astonishment, 'and it is by no means unlikely that it was applied in that manner. I am amazed, Martin, at your fertility of resource; I had no idea that you had so much acquaintance with human nature.'

'In any case, then,' said Martin Gurwood, ignoring the latter portion of his companion's speech, 'it will not be necessary for me to touch upon the question of money in my interview with Mrs. Claxton.'

'Certainly not,' said Humphrey, 'beyond broadly hinting, if you find it necessary, that she will be properly cared for. But my own feeling is, that she will be far too much overwhelmed to think of anything beyond the loss she has sustained, and her consequent present misery.'

'You do not under-state the unpleasantness and the difficulty of the mission you have

proposed for me,' said Martin, with a half-smile.

'I do not over-state it, my dear Gurwood, believe me,' said Statham. 'And all I can do now is to wish you God-speed in it.'

When Martin Gurwood returned to Great Walpole-street that afternoon, he found that Mr. Jeffreys had been sent for by Mrs. Calverley, and was installed in the dining-room, with various books and documents, which he was submitting to the widow. Madame Du Tertre sat at her friend's right hand, taking notes of such practical business suggestions as occurred to Mrs. Calverley, and of the replies to such inquiries as she herself thought fit to make. To Martin's great relief the banker's pass-book, which he had seen on the previous evening, was not amongst those produced.

Mrs. Calverley looked somewhat confused at her son's entrance. 'I asked Mr. Jeffreys to bring these books up here, Martin,' she said, 'as it was impossible for me to go to the

City just yet, and I wanted to have a general idea of how matters stood.'

'You did perfectly right, my dear mother,' said Martin absently, throwing himself into a chair. His conversation with Statham, the story he had heard, and the task he had undertaken, were all fresh in his mind, and he could not concentrate his attention on anything else.

'You seem fatigued, Monsieur Martin,' said Pauline, eyeing him closely; 'the worry of the last few days has been too much for you.'

'It is not that, Madame Du Tertre,' said Martin, rousing himself; 'the fact is, I have been engaged in the City all day, and that always tires me.'

'In the City!' repeated Pauline. 'Madame asked Monsieur Jeffreys, and he told us you had not been there.'

'Not to Mincing-lane. I had an engagement of my own in the City, which has occupied me all day.'

'Ah! and you found that very fatigu-

ing? The roar and the noise of London, the crowded streets, the want of fresh air, all this must be very unpleasant to you, Monsieur Martin. You will be glad to get back to your quiet, your country, and your—what you call—parish.'

'But I shall not be able to return there for some little time to come, I fear,' said Martin; 'I have a great deal yet to do in London.'

'I should like you to go through some of these books with me to-morrow. Mr. Jeffreys can leave them here, and can come up to-morrow, and—'

'Not to-morrow, mother,' said Martin. 'I have an engagement of importance which will occupy me the whole day.'

Mrs. Calverley looked displeased. 'It is much better not to postpone these matters,' she said.

But Martin Gurwood answered shortly, 'It cannot be to-morrow, mother; the appointment which I have made must be kept.' And as he looked up, the tell-tale colour came

again to his cheeks as he saw Madame Du Tertre's eyes eagerly fastened on him.

‘An appointment which must be kept,’ muttered Pauline to herself, as she locked her chamber-door for the night. ‘I was right, then! This man has been away all day, engaged on some business which he does not name. He has an appointment for to-morrow, about the nature of which he is also silent. I am convinced that he is keeping something secret, and have an inexplicable feeling that that something has to do with me. Mrs. Calverley will have to pass her day in solitude to-morrow, for I too have an appointment which I must keep, and when Monsieur Martin has an interview with his friend, I shall not be far away.

Madame Du Tertre was with her dear friend very early the next morning. She had received a letter, she said, from a poor cousin of hers, who, helpless and friendless, had arrived in London the previous evening. Pauline must go to her at once, but would return

by dinner-time. Mrs. Calverley graciously gave her consent to this proceeding, and Pauline took her leave.

Soon after breakfast Martin Gurwood issued from the house, and hailing the driver of a hansom cab, which was just coming out from the adjacent mews, fresh for its day's work, stepped lightly into the vehicle, and was driven off. Immediately afterwards, a lady, wearing a large black cloth cloak and hat, with a thick veil, called the next hansom that appeared and bade its driver keep the other cab, now some distance ahead, in view.

An ostler, who was passing by, with a bit of straw in his mouth, and an empty sack thrown over his shoulders, heard the direction given and grinned cynically.

‘The old game! Always a woman for that sort of caper!’ he muttered to himself as he disappeared down the mews.

CHAPTER V.

PARSON'S WORK.

MARTIN GURWOOD had a disturbed ride to Hendon. The difficulty of the task which he had undertaken to discharge seemed to increase as he progressed towards his destination, and he lay back in the cab buried in thought, revolving in his mind the best manner of breaking the fearful news of which he was the bearer, and wondering how it would be received. From time to time he raised himself to gaze at the prettiness of the scenery through which he was passing, to look at the wild, gorse-covered expanse of Hampstead Heath, and to refresh his eyes, wearied with the dull monotony of the London bricks and the glare of the London pavement, with that

soft greenery which is so eminently characteristic of our northern suburbs; but the thought of the duty before him prevented his enjoying the sight as he otherwise would, and resuming his reverie, he remained absorbed until he roused himself at the entrance of Hendon village.

‘There is the finger-post that Statham spoke of, and the little pond close by,’ he said to himself. ‘It is no use taking the cab any farther; I suppose I had better make the best of my way to Rose Cottage on foot.’ So saying, he raised his stick, and, obedient to the signal, the cabman drew up at the side of the road. ‘You had better go and put up your horse at the inn,’ said Martin to him; ‘it has been a long pull for him, poor animal, and I shall be some little time before I want to return.’

The driver carefully inspected his fare. He had come a long way, and was now setting down, not at any house, not at any lodge, but in an open country road. ‘Was it a case of—no!’ The gravity of Martin Gurwood’s

face, the length of his coat, the spotless stiffness of his white cravat, had their effect even on this ribald of the cab-rank.

‘You will come for me, sir, then, to the public when you want me?’ he said, touching his hat with his forefinger, and drove away contented.

Then Martin Gurwood, following Statham’s directions, walked slowly up the little street, took the turning leading to the church, and looked out for Rose Cottage. There it was, standing some distance back from the road, with the ruddy glow of the Virginia creeper not yet wholly gone from it. Martin Gurwood stopped at the garden-gate and looked at the little paradise, so trim and orderly, so neatly kept, so thoroughly comfortable, and yet so fully unpretentious, with the greatest admiration. Then he lifted the latch and walked towards the house.

The gate swung to behind him, and Alice, who was in her bedroom hearing little Bell her lessons, heard the clanking of the latch. She laid down her book, and stopping the

child's babbling by her uplifted finger, leant her head to listen.

‘What is it, mamma?’ asked little Bell, in wonderment.

‘Hush, dear,’ said Alice, ‘I heard the garden gate. No sound of wheels! Then he cannot have brought his luggage; still it must be John.’

She rose from her seat, and hurried down the stairs into the little hall. Just as she reached the half-glass door, and had her hand upon the lock, a man stepped into the portico; the figure was strange to her—it was not John.

She felt as though she must faint; her grasp on the door relaxed, and she staggered against the wall. Seeing her condition, the gentleman entered the hall, took her with a kind firm hold by the arm, and led her into the dining-room, the door of which stood open. She went passively, making no resistance, taking no notice, but throwing herself into a chair, and staring blankly at him, stricken dumb with sickening apprehension.

‘I am speaking to Mrs.—Mrs. Claxton?’ he said, after a moment’s pause, in a soft, kind voice.

He was a young man, she began to notice, fair and good-looking, and dressed in clerical garb. That last fact had a peculiar significance for her. In the far north-east of England, on the sea-coast, where some of Alice’s early days had been passed, it was the practice of the fishermen, when one of their number had been lost, to get the parson to go to the newly-made widow and break the news to her. In a stormy season Alice had often seen the sable-garbed messenger proceeding on his doleful mission, and the remembrance of him and of the ‘parson’s work,’ as it was called, when he was so engaged, rose vividly before her, and inspired her with sudden terror.

‘You are a clergyman?’ she said, looking hard at him.

‘I am,’ he replied, still in the same soft tone. ‘My name is Gurwood—Martin Gurwood; and I have come here to—’

‘You have come here to tell me something dreadful—I know it, I feel it—something dreadful about my husband!’

She pushed her hair back from off her face, and leaned forward on the table, looking at him, her eyes staring, her lips apart. Martin thought he had scarcely ever seen anything so beautiful.

‘My visit to you certainly relates to Mr. Claxton,’ he began, and then he hesitated and looked down.

‘Ah!’ she cried, immediately noticing his confusion, ‘it is about John, then. There is something wrong, I know. Tell me all about it at once. I can bear it. I am strong—much stronger than I look. I entreat you not to keep me in suspense.’

‘I am deeply grieved for you, madam,’ said Martin, ‘for you are right in anticipating that I bring bad news about Mr. Claxton. During his absence from home, he was attacked by a very sharp illness.’

‘He was ill when he left here,’ cried Alice. ‘I knew it; and Mr. Broadbent, the doctor,

knew it too, though I could not get him to say so. He ought not to have gone away. I ought not to have let him go. Now tell me, sir, pray; he has been very ill, you say; is he better?’

‘I trust he is better,’ said Martin solemnly.

Something in his tone struck Alice at once.

‘Ah,’ she cried, with a short sharp scream, ‘I know now—he is dead!’ And covering her face with her hands, she sobbed violently.

Martin Gurwood sat by, gazing at her with tear-dimmed eyes. He was not a man given to the reading of character; he had not been in the room with this girl for more than five minutes, he had not exchanged ten sentences with her, and yet he was certain that Humphrey Statham was perfectly right in the estimate which he had formed of her, and that, however cruelly she might have been treated, she herself was wholly innocent.

After some moments, Alice raised her head from out her hands.

‘I can listen to you now,’ she said very

quietly. 'Will you tell me all about it? I suppose it was because I recognised you as a clergyman that gave me the intuitive knowledge that something dreadful had happened, and that you had come to tell me all. I am ready to hear it now.'

Martin Gurwood was horribly discomposed at this. He felt he could give her no information; for it would be impossible to tell her that the man whom she supposed to be her husband had died on the day that he left Hendon, as she would naturally inquire why the news of his death had so long been kept from her, and Martin owned to himself that he was not good at invention. He did not know what to say, and he therefore remained silent, his hand fluttering nervously round his mouth.

'My dear madam,' commenced Martin, with much hesitation, 'beyond the awful fact, there is indeed nothing to tell.'

She looked disappointed for an instant; then, striving to control the working of her lips, she said:

‘Did he ask for me? Did he speak of me before—before— Ah, my darling John! My dear, good old John, kindest, best, and dearest. I cannot bear it. What shall I do!’

She broke down utterly, and again buried her face, down which the tears were streaming, in her hands.

Knowing the impossibility of affording her any relief, Martin Gurwood sat helplessly by. He could only wait until the outburst of grief should moderate; he knew that it was of no use attempting to check it; so he waited.

Presently she raised her head.

‘I thought I had more command over myself,’ she said. ‘I did not know I was so weak. But when there is any occasion for me to act, I shall be found strong enough. Tell me, sir, if you please, where is he? When will they bring him home?’

Martin Gurwood was not prepared for this question; it was not one of those which he had talked over with Statham. Its being put so straightforward and direct, was a con-

tingency which he never contemplated, and he knew not how to meet it.

‘Where is he?’ repeated Alice, observing his hesitation. ‘There is perhaps some difficulty about his being brought here.’

‘There — there is,’ said Martin Gurwood, catching at the chance.

‘Then I will go to him. I will be taken to him at once.’

‘There will be some difficulty about that, my dear madam,’ said Martin. ‘I am afraid it cannot be managed so easily as you seem to anticipate.’

‘Difficulty! Cannot be managed! I do not understand what you mean, sir.’

‘Why,’ said Martin, hesitating worse than ever, ‘you see that—in these matters—’

‘In these matters, who should be with them, who should be by them,’ cried Alice, ‘but their nearest and dearest? Who shall tell me not to go to my husband? Who shall gainsay my right to be by him at such a time? He had no relatives; he was mine — mine alone, and I was all the world to him! O, my

dear old John!' And again she burst into an agony of tears.

Martin Gurwood was almost at his wits' end. He foresaw that if the question were put to him again—as it would be put, he knew, so soon as her access of grief was over—if Alice again called upon him to take her to her husband, in default of any reasonable excuse he should probably be forced to confess the truth, and then he must be prepared to take the consequences, which he knew would be serious. This girl's utter prostration and humiliation, Mrs. Calverley's first outburst of rage, and subsequent malignant revenge, the shattering of the dead man's reputation, and the despicable slander and gossip which would ensue, Martin Gurwood thought of all these; knew that their being called into action was dependent on how to manage to get through the next few minutes. Why on earth had he undertaken this business? Why had not Statham, whose experience in such matters ought to have forewarned him that such a point was likely to arise—why had he not in-

structed him how to deal with it? From her point of view, this poor girl was, no doubt, strictly right. She considered herself to be the dead man's widow (Martin had now not the smallest doubt on that point), and was therefore perfectly justified in demanding to be taken to him. Even if Martin Gurwood's conscience would have absolved him from telling a white lie on the occasion, his inventive powers were not of calibre sufficient to devise the necessary fiction; he felt there was no chance for him but to tell Alice as little of the truth as would satisfy her, in as roundabout a manner as he could manage, and then to risk the result.

Just as he had arrived at this determination he raised his eyes, and saw a little child run past the window. A small, delicate-looking girl, with long fair hair streaming down her shoulders, prettily, even elegantly dressed, and laughing heartily as she pursued a large elastic ball which bounded before her. Martin saw her but for an instant, then she disappeared down the garden path.

But that momentary glimpse was sufficient to give Martin Gurwood an idea. And when Alice raised her tear-blurred face, now stern with the expression of a set and determined purpose, he was to a certain extent prepared for her.

‘You must take me to my husband,’ she said quietly. ‘I am grateful to you for coming here Mr.—’

‘Gurwood—my name is Martin Gurwood.’

‘I am grateful to you for coming here, Mr. Gurwood, and for the delicate manner in which you have performed your task. But now I wish to be taken to my husband. I have a right to make that claim, and I do so.’

‘My dear madam,’ said Martin Gurwood, in the same quiet tone, but with much more firmness than he had hitherto exhibited, ‘I will not allow that you owe me the smallest obligation; but if you did, the way in which you could best repay me would be by exciting yourself as little as possible. Under these most painful circumstances, you must not give way, Mrs. Claxton; you must keep up as best

you can, for the sake of his memory, for the sake of the child which he has left behind him.'

'Little Bell? the child who is playing in the garden, and who just now passed the window?'

'Yes, a fragile, fair, bright-looking mite.'

'Little Bell! She is not Mr. Claxton's child, sir, nor mine, but she is another living proof of John's goodness, and thoughtfulness, and care for others.' She rose from her seat as she spoke, and wandered in a purposeless manner to the window. 'So thoughtful, so unselfish, so generous,' she murmured. 'It is three years ago since little Bell first came here.'

'Indeed!' said Martin, delighted at the unexpected reprieve, and anxious to divert her thoughts as long as possible from the one dread subject. 'Indeed! And where did she come from?'

'From the workhouse,' said Alice, not looking at him, but gazing straight before her through the window, against which her forehead was pressed—'from the workhouse. It

was John's doing that we brought her here—all John's doing. It was from Mr. Tomlinson, the clergyman,' she continued, in a low tone, and with a certain abrupt incoherence of manner, 'that we heard about it—such cold weather, with the snow lying deep in the fields. Mr. Tomlinson told us that they had found her lying against a haystack in one of Farmer Mullins's fields, half frozen, and with a baby at her breast. So thin, and pale, and delicate, she looked when we went down to see her lying in the workhouse bed. She had been starved as well as frozen, Mr. Broadbent said, and her cheeks were hollow, and there were great dark circles round her eyes. But she must have been pretty, O so pretty! Her chestnut hair was soft and delicate, and her poor thin hands, almost transparent, were white and well-shaped.'

In his first relief from the repetition of her demand which he expected Alice would make, Martin Gurwood did not pay much attention to the commencement of her little story, but as it progressed his interest became excited,

and at this point he left his chair and stood by her at the window.

‘Who was she?’ he asked. ‘Where did she come from?’

‘We never knew,’ said Alice, shaking her head. ‘She never spoke from the time they found her until her death, two days after; but she had never been married; there was no wedding-ring on her finger, and when they told me that, I turned to John and spoke to him.’

‘Do you recollect what you said?’ asked Martin, half with a desire to satisfy his own curiosity, half wishing to lead her on.’

‘Recollect?’ said Alice. ‘I remember the very words. “O John,” I said, “my dear old John, isn’t it an awful thing to think how this poor creature has been deceived; you may depend upon it, John,” I said, “that the man who has brought her to this shame made her a promise of marriage, or deceived her in some cruel and heartless manner.”’

‘Did you say that?’ asked Martin, in a low voice.

‘I did, and more. “Her death will lie at his door, John,” I said, “as surely as if he had killed her with his hand. He did kill her, first her soul and then her body, and he will be held responsible for the murder of each!” I recollect then that John threw his arms around me and implored me to stop. His face was quite white, and the tears were streaming down his cheeks, for he had the tenderest heart. And then when the poor girl died, he proposed that we should take the baby and adopt it for our own; and we did so. Strange it was, I recollect, that for weeks after that, whenever John was at home, and in one of his silent moods, which came upon him first about that time, I would see him of an evening, when he thought I was not looking at him, with his eyes fixed upon me, and with the tears stealing down his cheeks.’

Was it strange, knowing what he did? Martin thought not; but he did not speak.

‘He was thinking of that poor girl, I suppose,’ murmured Alice, half to herself; ‘thinking of all the troubles and sufferings she had

gone through; thinking, I shouldn't wonder, that they might have been mine, if I had not been mercifully placed in a different position, and out of the reach of temptation; for he had the tenderest heart, and he loved me so dearly — O so dearly! that the mere thought of anything happening to me to cause me pain or suffering, was enough to make him utterly wretched.' Then the sense of her situation dawning again upon her, she cried out: 'And now he is lost to me for ever! There is no one now to think of or take care of me! We were all in all to each other, and now I am left alone in the world; what shall I do, O, what shall I do!'

It had been Martin Gurwood's lot, in the discharge of his clerical duties, to listen a hundred times in his life to this despairing wail from women just robbed of their husbands by death: a hundred times had he cheered the darkened and dispirited soul with recapitulations of the Almighty goodness, with the hope that the parting from the loved and lost one was but temporary and not of long

duration, and that in the future the two reunited might enjoy an eternity of bliss such as they had never known before. What could he say to the woman now writhing before him in misery and despair? What word of encouragement, what scrap of hope could he whisper into her dulled ear? How could he, with the fearful knowledge which he had acquired, speak to her of the future of this man, whose memory she so blindly worshipped, ignorant of the manner in which he had basely betrayed her? How could he even speak kindly of the dead man's past, and echo the terms of affection in which she mentioned him, knowing as he did the full measure of the deceit and iniquity practised upon her by the man whom she imagined to have been her husband?

No! In all Martin Gurwood's clerical career (and the experiences of a zealous and earnest clergyman in an agricultural district are fraught with more horrors, and tend to a lower appreciation of the human race than the uninitiated would believe), he had never

had to deal with such a case as this. In his reproof he could temper justice with mercy, in his consolation he could bid 'despair and anguish flee the struggling soul;' but to attempt now to cast down the idol from its pedestal, to attempt to show to the heart-broken woman, whose sobs were resounding through the room, that the man whose loss she was deploring had been her worst and bitterest enemy, to point out that the emotion which he had exhibited at the story of the outcast woman and her baby, was merely caused by 'the conscience-prick and the memory-smart,' proving to him the similarity of his own crime with that of the man on whom he was invited to sit in judgment—to do all or any of this was beyond Martin Gurwood's power; he ought to have done it, he knew, but he was only human after all, and he decided to leave it alone.

The story of the frozen woman with the baby in her arms—his thoughts had wandered away to that—slight and delicate was she, and with long chestnut hair—what a strange

coincidence! That this man, who had himself deceived a young and trusting woman, should by his unsuspecting victim be called upon to exercise his charity towards another victim, should be expected to denounce the crime of which he had himself been guilty! How strange to think that—Martin was interrupted in his reverie by a movement on Alice's part. She had risen to her feet, twisted her dishevelled hair into a knot behind her head, and stood pale and statuesque before him.

‘I shall be ready in five minutes,’ she said, ‘and I shall then expect you to take me straight to where my husband's body is lying. If you refuse to do so, I shall call upon you to tell me where it is—to give me the address. I have a right as his wife—O, my God!’ she moaned—‘as his widow! to demand that, and I shall do so.’

The critical time had arrived. Martin knew that, and felt stronger and more self-reliant than he had anticipated. The fact was, that he thought he saw a way of tiding the matter over until he could communicate with

Humphrey Statham, and possibly get his friend to take the burden of the disclosure upon himself.

‘My dear madam,’ he said, ‘I can quite appreciate your anxiety, which is perfectly natural under the circumstances, and which I shall be most anxious to alleviate; but I must ask you to have a little patience. This evening—should you still wish it—you shall be taken to the place where Mr. Claxton’s body was conveyed.’

‘Where is that place, Mr. Gurwood?’ cried Alice. ‘There is some mystery about this which I do not understand; I insist upon knowing where this place is!’

‘You shall know,’ said Martin, quietly. ‘The place to which the body was conveyed was Mr. Calverley’s house in Great Walpole-street.’

‘Mr. Calverley’s! What, John’s partner?’

‘Mr. Calverley, of Mincing-lane. You have heard of him?’

‘O, a thousand times. Mr. Claxton was

a sleeping partner in the house of Calverley and Company, you know. O, of course it was quite natural that my poor darling should be carried there! I am so relieved, Mr. Gurwood. I was afraid that poor John had been taken to some horrid place, and thought that was the reason why you objected to my going there; but as he is at Mr. Calverley's house—'

'For that reason you must defer going there until the evening,' said Martin Gurwood, with more firmness than he had hitherto shown. 'This sad event has thrown the house into great confusion, and it will be necessary that I should go back and apprise Mrs. Calverley, whom you do not know, I think, of your intention of coming there to-night.'

'I suppose you are right,' said Alice, in a disappointed tone. 'I suppose, even at such a dreadful time as this, there are regulations and observances which must be respected. Will you promise me that you will come to me this evening?'

‘Either I myself or some friend whom I can trust,’ said Martin. ‘And now I must leave you; for the time is short, and I have a great deal to do in it.’

He took one glance at her pale, tearful face, with even more than interest, and withdrew.

He was thinking to himself how very beautiful she was, when his reflections were checked by his catching sight of a female figure, in a black cloak, in the path before him.

On his near approach the lady raised her veil, and to his astonished eyes revealed the features of Madame Du Tertre.

CHAPTER VI.

RUN TO EARTH.

THE driver of the hansom cab which Pauline had chartered did his duty nobly by his fare. In going so long a distance, and on a comparatively deserted road, he knew too well the impossibility of concealing his pursuit from the observation of his brother Jehu ; indeed, no sooner did they pass the confines of Guelph Park than the driver who had Martin in his charge turned round, and there ensued between the two men an interchange of signs familiar only to the initiated of the craft, which set them both at their ease, and prevented farther interrogation. Pauline's driver followed the other hansom at sufficient distance never to lose sight of it ; and when Martin Gurwood stopped the cab and alighted from it, the pursuing cabman drew up at a con-

venient bend of the road and communicated the fact to his fare. Then Pauline jumped out, discharged the man—she would provide her own means of return, she said—and slowly and stealthily followed Martin's retreating figure.

The pursuit in which she was engaged was by no means unpleasant to Pauline; indeed, she rather liked it. There was, as has before been noticed, something stealthy and cat-like in her nature and her manner; and the mere fact that, unknown to him, she was watching a person who was evidently engaged in a private mission, the discovery of which might seriously affect him, and would in any event be disagreeable to him, had for her a potent charm. As she journeyed onward in the cab, her thoughts had been fixed upon the object of Martin Gurwood's secret expedition. That it was of importance she was certain, or he would not otherwise have refused with so much decision his mother's request that he should devote the day to the inspection of documents in Mr. Jeffrey's

company. That it had to do with the mystery of Calverley and Claxton, and consequently with the greater, and to her far more interesting mystery of Tom Durham's disappearance, she fully believed. As yet she had been able to discover nothing concerning the paper which she had found in the wooden box underneath Mr. Calverley's desk, the memorandum of the transfer of two thousand pounds 'to be given to T. D. at the request of A. C.' Perhaps the very business on which she was engaged might give her some clue to it—might reveal the identity of this Claxton which Mr. Calverley had so pertinaciously concealed from her. Once brought face to face with him, she could readily trust to her own wit and tact to extract from him the information she required, or, at all events, to learn something that would be of service to her in accomplishing her self-imposed task.

What can there be for Martin Gurwood to search after in this queer, out-of-the-world village, amongst these old-fashioned cottages, standing back in gardens, where the size of

the trees, the hedges, and the evergreens shows the length of time they have been growing? This man Claxton cannot live in this place, so remote from the bustle of life, so inaccessible to ordinary traffic. This is a spot to which one might retire for rest and repose after a long career of business. What has brought Martin Gurwood to such a place? Whom can he be seeking here?

As these thoughts passed through Pauline's mind, the object of her pursuit turned from the high road and passed out of her sight. She noted the spot where he had disappeared, and when she reached it was just in time to see him leaning over the half-gate, and contemplating the garden stretched out before him. Pauline paused at the end of the road until she saw him open the gate and enter the garden; then she slowly sauntered on.

When Pauline reached the gate Martin Gurwood had disappeared. The gate, slammed to by the spring attached to it, was still vibrating on its hinges, his retreating footsteps on the gravel path were still faintly audible,

but the man himself was not to be seen. So far, then, she had succeeded. She had tracked him to the house which he had come to visit ; now she must ascertain what was his business there.

How to set about this perplexed her sorely. A score of different notions rushed into her mind. It would be easy to ascertain the name and character of the occupant of the house from any of the tradespeople in the village, but on looking round Pauline found that there were no shops within sight, and she was fearful that during the time occupied by her absence Martin Gurwood might leave the place. Should she open the gate, boldly march up the carriage-drive, and ask for the master of the house, trusting to herself to find some pretext for addressing him when he came? That would lay her open to the chance of Martin Gurwood's seeing her before she had been able to gain any information, and either postponing the business which had brought him there, or deceiving her as to its nature. She must think it all over more

carefully before she acted, and meanwhile she would walk round and survey the premises.

The cottage stood, as has been stated, in the midst of a very large old-fashioned garden. On the left of this garden was a narrow path, bounded on one side by the garden itself, on the other by a huge hedge belonging to Doctor Broadbent, and encouraged by him in its wildest luxuriance, to screen his premises from the observation of such of the villagers as used the path for the short cut from the village to the London road. The hedge had at one time been equally luxuriant on the Rose-Cottage side, but Alice had strong notions of the necessity for plenty of air, and had persuaded John to have it trimmed to a moderate height. 'What on earth do we want with that great green screen keeping off every breath of air,' she said; 'and as for what Mr. Broadbent says about privacy, that is all nonsense. Not ten people in the day go down the lane, and none of them ever think of looking into our garden. If they did, they

would be perfectly welcome ; would they not, John? I am sure there is nothing here that we wish to conceal ; is there, dear?' And John acquiescing, as he did in everything she proposed, the hedge was trimmed accordingly. So that Pauline, walking down this path, found that as soon as she had proceeded a certain distance she had an uninterrupted view of the back of the house, and of a large portion of the garden.

She knew nothing of horticulture, and had never given any attention to gardens, they had not come into her line of life, but she was always observant, and she noticed the trim and orderly manner in which this place was kept, and thought that it reflected great credit on the gardener, whom she saw in the distance wheeling away a great load of dead leaves, which he had collected into a heap and pressed into his barrow. She was about to call the man to her, and compliment him on the state of his garden, at the same time taking advantage of the opportunity of asking a few questions about his employer, when a

little girl, with long fair hair streaming down her back, ran out of the shrubbery in chase of an india-rubber ball which bounded before her.

Pauline drew back for an instant, but the child did not notice her, so engrossed was she by her game. In a few minutes, however, the ball bounded over the hedge, and fell at Pauline's feet.

The child looked round for aid, which was generally available in the person of the gardener; but the gardener had wheeled his barrow out of sight by this time, and all that the child could do, therefore, was to put her finger to her lip, and burst into tears.

'Don't cry, my child,' said Pauline softly, speaking to her.

The child looked up, but on catching sight of Pauline hid her face in her hands, and cried more copiously than before.

'Don't cry, my child,' repeated Pauline; 'don't be afraid. See, here is your ball,' holding it up. 'Shall I throw it to you.'

'Ess,' said the child, looking up shyly

through her fingers, 'frow it down at wonst, pease.'

Pauline complied. The ball fell at the child's feet, and rolled a little distance behind her, but she took no notice of it; she was fully occupied in examining her newly found friend.

Out of her great blue eyes the child stared in silence for some moments, then coming closer to the hedge she said, still staring earnestly, 'Are you a Hinjin?'

Pauline was completely puzzled.

'A what, child?' she asked.

'A Hinjin,' repeated the child. 'Do you tum from Hinjia?'

'Gr—r—rand Dieu !' cried Pauline, surprised into one of the exclamations of her old life. 'No, child ; what makes you think that?'

'Tos you have dot a brack face, and you speak so funny,' said the child.

Pauline smiled. 'A black face,' she said to herself. 'I am swarthy enough, I know ; but if this child thinks me black, she must needs have lived with very fair people. She

seems sufficiently intelligent, and may probably be able to give me some information. What is your name, my dear?' she said to the child.

'Bell,' said the child promptly.

'Bell!' repeated Pauline; 'what a pretty name—blonde et belle! What is your other name, my dear?'

The child thought for a moment, and then said gravely, 'Lickle Bell.'

'O, but you must have some other name besides that,' said Pauline. 'What is your other name?'

'No more,' said the child, shaking her head.

'Yes, but your nom de famille—your family name. You have that?'

'No, no, no,' said the child, emphasising each word with a shake of her head.

'But your papa—'

'He's dorn away travelling on 'ail'oad.'

'Gone travelling on the railroad, has he? Has your mamma gone with him?'

'No, me mamma's at home—been teaching me my 'cripture 'istory.'

‘What a kind, good mamma!’ said Pauline, with a curling lip. ‘And what is your mamma’s name, dear?’

‘Misse C’axton, ’Ose Tottage, ’Endon, Mid’sex,’ said the child, all in a breath, the sentence being evidently the result of much practice.

Mrs. Claxton, the wife of the man at whose request Mr. Calverley had given the two thousand pounds to Tom Durham. Ah, how Pauline’s heart bounded, and how the colour flushed into her swarthy cheeks, at hearing those words! She had been right, then; the instinct that so seldom deserted her had served her truly in this instance. She had felt all along that the secret business on which Martin Gurwood had been engaged had some reference to her affairs, and now she had proved it.

What were the relations between Martin Gurwood and Mrs. Claxton? Pshaw! Had her steady business-like brain taken to weaving romances? What more likely than that Mrs. Calverley’s son should come out to seek

an interview on business matters with the wife of her dead husband's partner? Stay, though—with the partner, yes; but the child had said that Mr. Claxton was away travelling on business. Pauline knew of her own knowledge that Mrs. Calverley had never seen Mr. Claxton, much less his wife, and recognised at once that had business been the object of the interview, it was Mr. Jeffreys who would have been dispatched to seek an interview with the partner, and not Mr. Gurwood to see the wife. The mystery still remained in fullest force, and had yet to be elucidated by her.

Of what more use could the child be to her? The child, who, seeing her newly-found friend immersed in her own thoughts, had again turned to her ball. There might be still some more information to be obtained, and Pauline would try and gain it.

‘And so your papa is not at home?’ she commenced.

‘Tavelling on ’ail’oad,’ said the child, making the ball bound again.

‘And your mamma is all alone?’

‘Not all alone now, gemply tum. Mamma thought it was papa, and me got off ’cripture ’istory. Me saw it was strange gemply, and run off wif my ball.’

‘A strange gentleman, eh?’ said Pauline.
‘Did you never see him before?’

‘Me never saw him before; me wish he would always come at lesson-time.’

‘And how long has your papa been away from home?’

‘Two, free weeks, two, free months. Me frow my ball to you, and you frow me back again.’

As she spoke the ball came bounding across the hedge. Pauline took it up and threw it back to the child.

‘Do you know Mr. Calverley, dear?’ she asked, as Bell stood with the ball in her hand, ready to launch it at her again.

‘Misse Calverley,’ repeated the child, ‘me not know him; me know Doctor Broadbent, what brings nassie powders in his pocket.’

‘You don’t know Mr. Calverley?’

‘No, me not know Misse Calverley. Me go and get George to play at ball,’ she added, after a moment’s pause, finding that there was no more amusement to be had from her newly-found friend, and running away after the gardener.

Pauline watched the child disappear in the shrubbery, then folding her arms across her breast, fell into her old habit of walking to and fro to think out the emotions under which she was labouring.

‘Perhaps she had deceived herself after all, perhaps her fertile brain had been conjuring up and giving life and name to a set of phantoms. There was no evidence to connect this Mrs. Claxton with the pale-faced woman whom she had seen at Southampton, who might have been a mere emissary of Tom’s, employed by him to get the money and bring it to him there. It seemed impossible that the wife of such a man as Mr. Claxton, who was on all sides represented to be a partner in the house of Calverley and Company, could descend to such a position ; it seemed impos-

sible that— She stopped in her walk motionless and transfixed.

She had been looking at the house, and at one of the lower windows, a large French window opening on to the grounds, she suddenly saw the figure of a woman. She recognised it in an instant; recognised it as the pale-faced woman whom she had seen walking to and fro on the railway platform at Southampton with Tom Durham, and of whom he had taken such an affectionate farewell; pale-faced still, and tearful, with bent head, and wringing hands. She stands for a moment alone, the next instant she is joined by Martin Gurwood, who seems by his actions to be exhorting her to confidence and courage. It is, of course, by their actions alone that Pauline can judge what they are doing, but her southern nature leads her to translate their pantomime, feeble though it may be, more readily than could any one less accustomed to gesture and action. See her bent head, her shrinking figure, her hands outspread before her. Then notice his look turned upward,

the growing uprightness of his stately figure, his elevated hand. Evidently she is giving way under the weight of some distress, while he is consoling her, and, as Pauline judges from his actions, pointing out to her the course of duty. The reverend's consolation has but little effect, Pauline thinks, as the pale-faced woman, giving way to her grief, sinks upon the ground, and lies prostrate at her companion's feet.

Now to see what is the exact state of the relations between them, now to see whether the secret which from the first she has believed Martin Gurwood to be concealing in his breast has reference to a woman ; whether this misogynist, as his friends think him, and as he strives to prove himself, is but as other men are, frail and feeble, liable to be diverted from his path of duty, and to be turned hither and thither by a woman's influence.

By Martin's actions the reply is patent to her at once. Had he been this woman's lover, had he been striving to become her lover, he would have cast himself down on

his knees beside her, and striven to have raised her, bidding her repose herself and her grief on him. As it was, he stood there looking at her, as Pauline could distinguish, with eyes full of sorrowful regard, with head bent, and hands that involuntarily sought to raise her, and were then restrained and folded across his breast. No farther action, no movement of his lips so far as she could see. 'It is in his capacity as priest,' she said to herself, 'that he is here; there is no question of his being this woman's lover; evidently she is suffering from some great trouble, and he has come to announce it to her. They are not as our priests, these Protestants, and he is an Englishman besides. He has told his story in their usual cold, matter-of-fact unimpassioned way, and awaits now quietly until she shall arise from the swoon into which the receipt of the intelligence has thrown her. So far I have been wrong. That he has a secret, I still believe; but that it is not in the least connected with this woman I am sure. What it may be I have still

to learn; and I will learn it, that it may give me power over him, and, through him, over his mother, whom I intend to minister to my comforts, and to be my principal source of support for years to come. This pale-faced woman too!' She had thought that she had brought down both the birds with one stone; now each mystery was still a sealed book to her.

How was she to get at them? It would have been useless to inquire of the tradespeople in the village now, who would simply tell her what she knew already, the name of the occupant of Rose Cottage, of his station in life, of his position as Mr. Calverley's partner. Of all this she was already aware. From whom was she to learn more? From Martin Gurwood himself, and no one else. She must brave it out with him; she must bring to that interview, which must take place at once, all her courage and all her knowledge of the world; the one to bear her up in confronting the rage which he would undoubtedly feel at finding he had been fol-

lowed ; the other in enabling her to see through any deception he might try to practise upon her.

See ! they move. The pale-faced woman rises from the floor. Ah, with what dignity, Pauline acknowledges to herself, keeping her eyes straight upon the window. She stands upright now before her companion, and is evidently speaking with simple unexaggerated action. He is striving to refute what she is saying, if he can be judged by the bending of his shoulders, by the moving of his hand. He fails, though ; Pauline sees that. Then he bows in taking his leave, and disappears.

What she has to do must be done at once. She is to meet and confront him, and brazen it out before him. She had noticed that the cab in which he had come, after setting him down, had rolled off in the direction of the village. To get to the village, he must pass the end of the path in which she then stood. If she could get there before him, she would be in time. In another instant she had gathered her skirt around her, and set off into

a swift and steady run. She reached the end of the path as Martin Gurwood emerged through the garden-gate, and remained still, awaiting his approach.

He came on steadily, his eyes fixed upon the ground, until he was within a short distance of her. Then he looked up, and wavered in his walk for an instant, seeing her planted directly in his path. For an instant; the next, he continued his advance.—continued it even when she threw back her veil, and when, as she saw by a quick upward glance at him, he recognised her features.

It was best, she thought, that she should speak first.

‘Good morning, Mr. Gurwood,’ she said in a light and pleasant tone. ‘You are surprised to see me here?’

His face was stern and rigid, as he replied : ‘Had it been any one else, I might have been surprised; in Madame Du Tertre such conduct appears to me perfectly natural, and what I always imagined her perfectly capable of being guilty of.’

‘Such conduct! guilty of!’ she repeated.
 ‘This is harsh language, Monsieur Martin. Of what conduct, pray, have I been guilty?’

‘Of following me and spying out my actions, madame; of that there can be little doubt.’

‘And yet at that you are not surprised,’ she said, with a laugh. ‘You had so low an opinion of me, that you take “such conduct” as a matter of course. Well, I am not disposed to deny it. I have followed you, and I have, as you call it, spied upon your actions. It is for you to explain them.’

‘To explain them!’ cried Martin Gurwood, with a burst of indignation; ‘to whom, pray? To my conscience I can explain them readily enough; to those who have any claim upon me to ask for an explanation, I can give it. But to you, in what capacity am I to explain it?’

‘In my capacity as Mrs. Calverley’s friend and agent,’ said Pauline, making a bold stroke. ‘I am here in her interests; it is by her that I am authorised to do what I have done.’

The shot had told; she saw its effect at once in his blanched cheek and his hesitating manner.'

'You have come here as my mother's agent?' he asked.

'I have,' she replied, looking him straight in the face.

'Then,' he said after a moment's pause, 'if you are really and truly her friend, I must ask you in her interests to conceal from her all you have seen; to tell her a story in no way bearing upon the truth, to divert her thoughts and suspicions—for she must needs suspect, if she has employed you, as you say, to watch me in what I do—into some totally different channel.'

Pauline smiled grimly. 'I thought so,' she exclaimed. 'It will not suit the Reverend Martin Gurwood, rigid moralist, the most holy of men, to have it known, even by his mother, that he has been to visit a pretty woman, and that his conversation with her has been of such effect that she has cast herself at his feet during her husband's absence, and that he has

been enabled to give her consolation in her deepest sorrow.'

'If your taunt fell upon me, and upon me alone,' said Martin, drawing himself up, and looking straight at her, 'it would be harmless enough, but I have others to think of, and others to shield. If you knew who the lady is of whom you are speaking in this thoughtless manner, you would—'

'I know well enough,' said Pauline, with a sneer; 'this woman—this friend of yours, is the wife of Mr. Claxton, the partner of your mother's husband, whom you have just buried.'

'You think so,' cried Martin. 'She thinks so herself; but it is for me to undeceive you, though I have kept the truth from her. This woman is one whom Mr. Calverley most basely deceived. Under a false name—the name which you have mentioned—he wooed and won her; and she, at this moment, believes herself to be his widow.'

CHAPTER VII.

A THIRD IN THE PLOT.

EVEN Pauline's stoical calmness was not proof against the announcement which she had just heard from Martin Gurwood. She staggered back, staring wildly at him, and putting her hand to her head as though doubting the evidence of her senses. Martin, thinking she as about to fall, proffered his arm, but she put it aside gently.

‘Thank you,’ she said; ‘I shall be very well presently; the shock was a little too much for me. To have one's faith in such a man's character rudely shaken, is — But I will not add to your distress, Monsieur Martin, by any observations of mine. You are going this way? Then let us walk together. After a little reflection, I shall be better able to comprehend the full nature of the disclo-

sure you have been good enough to make to me.'

Martin bowed. And they set off walking towards the village, both silent and buried in their own thoughts.

Pauline had indeed need for a little quiet, in which she might turn over in her mind the news which she had just heard, and calculate its bearing on her future. Mr. Calverley, under the assumed name of Claxton, was living with this woman at Hendon; and of course was in the habit of visiting her, when he pretended that he was away on business, inspecting the ironworks in the North. Pauline saw that at once, and half smiled as she allowed to herself that Mrs. Calverley's hatred of the Swartmoor Ironworks was not without cause. And as for the reverend's story that the woman had been betrayed by a false marriage—bah! that was to be taken for what it was worth.

What a strange old man, this Calverley! How rusé, how cunning! He had deceived even her. So quiet and staid and long-suffer-

ing as he seemed! It was not difficult to understand now why Mr. Claxton had never been formally presented to the household at Great Walpole-street. She was—stay, though! the link connecting her with Tom Durham, that was still wanting, and must be found. Could the reverend help her to it? She would try.

‘Tell me, Monsieur Martin, is this the first time you have seen this poor creature who has been so cruelly deceived?’

When Martin Gurwood raised his face, his cheeks were flushed at the imputation which he conceived Pauline’s question to convey. ‘This is the first time I have seen the lady,’ he said, in a grave tone, ‘and it is only lately that I have known of her existence.’

‘Indeed,’ said Pauline. ‘And from whom did you hear of her existence—not from Madame Calverley?’

‘Good Heavens, no!’ cried Martin. ‘It is of the utmost importance, for more reasons than one, that my mother should know nothing of this sad affair.’

‘Exactly,’ said Pauline, looking at him narrowly; ‘I perfectly agree with you. Then from whom did you have the information? You will pardon me, Monsieur Martin,’ she added in a soft voice, ‘but I take such an interest in this sad affair.’

‘From Mr. Broadbent, the doctor residing in this village. He happened to be with Doctor Haughton when the body was found, and recognised it as that of the gentleman whom he had known as Mr. Claxton.’

‘O, indeed! how sadly interesting!’ she said. ‘This reverend knows nothing about this pale-faced woman,’ she thought to herself, ‘and cannot help me in any way respecting her. Why my husband left me, where he is now, that tormenting mystery of my life, is still—save that I know that he and this woman are not now together—as far from solution as ever. That knowledge is, however, a point gained, and possessed as I am of this secret, I think I shall be enabled not merely to prevent their coming together again, but to have my revenge on her for what she has done already.’

And now let us see how the land lies, and how this reverend intends to proceed in the matter. His plumes were rather ruffled, I thought, just now; I must set them straight again.'

She turned to Martin Gurwood, who, with his eyes still downcast, was striding by her side, and said, 'I have been thinking over what you told me, Monsieur Martin, and I do not remember ever to have heard a sadder story. Ah, Monsieur Martin, it is lucky that it is into your hands that this poor young woman has fallen—you whose life has been so pure and blameless—'

'Madame Du Tertre,' he interrupted hurriedly, 'I must beg of you—'

'I repeat, Monsieur Martin, you whose life has been so pure and blameless—have I not heard of it from your mother? have I not watched it for some time myself?—can feel true Christian pity for this girl so cruelly betrayed. You are right, too, in keeping the mere fact of her existence secret from Madame Calverley. She would be furious, that good lady, and not without cause. She would be

furious; and when she is furious she loses her head, and would bring trouble and scandal upon the family. Do you know what I have been thinking about during our walk, Monsieur Martin? I have been thinking that you will require my assistance in this matter.'

'Your assistance, Madame Du Tertre?'

'Mine, Monsieur Martin. You who can see things so clearly will not require to be told that I have great influence with Madame Calverley; that influence shall be exercised in your behalf. I will enter into a compact with you to help you in aiding this unhappy woman, of whom you take so compassionate a view, by every means in my power, provided you do not interfere with any plans of mine as regards your mother.'

'I—I must first know what those plans are before I can agree to your proposition, madame,' said Martin, with hesitation.

'Are you in a position to make terms?' asked Pauline, with a short, hard laugh. 'I do not know myself what those plans are at present—nothing to hurt you or any one, you

may be sure; but you see I am in possession of your secret, and can work for or against you as I choose. There, don't look so scared, Monsieur Martin; I meant no harm. You will find me a trusty ally; a woman can do more in these cases than any man, however well-intentioned; and we may perhaps keep the truth of her real position from this poor creature for a time. And whenever it must be told, you may depend upon it I should break it to her better than you would.'

Martin glanced hurriedly at her as he comprehended the full force of what she said—as the exact position in which they stood to each other dawned upon him. He had been taken unawares, when his nervous system, always highly strung, was at its extreme point of tension after the interview with Alice, and scarce thinking what he was saying, he blurted out the secret which should never have passed his lips, and the revelation of which involved such dire consequences. What would Humphrey Statham say when he knew what had happened, as know it he must? He, cool, far-

seeing, and methodical, would be sure to reproach his friend with having acted on headstrong impulse. Martin blamed his own rashness; but what was said could not be unsaid. Madame Du Tertre, as she had remarked, was in possession of the facts, and the only way to treat her now was to make her a friend instead of an enemy, and to give in to her as far as was compatible with the plan already laid down. Her tendency was at present undoubtedly amiable, Martin thought, and it was best to encourage that spirit. He knew that in her assertion of her power over Mrs. Calverley she spoke truth, and it was all-important that that power should be exercised in their favour. His mother was splenetic and stubborn; once raised to a sense of her injuries, she would leave nothing undone to sweep this wretched woman from her path, and to crush her altogether. For Alice's sake, it was most important that the knowledge of her real position should be withheld from her as long as possible, and that when the announcement had to be made, it should be made with due delicacy.

He had been wrong in taking any outsider into his confidence, but under existing circumstances it was clear that Madame Du Tertre should be won over to their side, and treated with the respect which she seemed inclined to exact.

So, his mind filled with these thoughts, Martin Gurwood turned to her and said: 'You are perfectly right, Madame Du Tertre; your co-operation will be most valuable to me; and as to the terms which you propose, I am quite willing to accept them, recognising the rectitude of the principles by which you are governed.'

Recollecting his warlike declaration at the commencement of their interview, Pauline was more than half inclined to smile at this utterance, but she checked herself, and said: 'Then it is understood, Monsieur Martin, that our alliance commences from this moment. To prove my interest in it, I should be glad if you would tell me what immediate steps you propose taking in reference to this poor lady. Very much will depend upon your pre-

sent action; and I am anxious to know what it is.'

'Well,' replied Martin, rather taken aback by her prompt decision, 'the fact is that you will probably be called upon to exert your powers of diplomacy at once.'

'Such powers,' said Pauline, 'unless ready on an emergency, are but little worth. This poor creature does not know her position; under what circumstances have you left her?'

'I had a long and most heart-rending interview with her,' said Martin, 'part of which it appears you saw. I had to break to her that the man whom she supposed to be her husband, and whom she loved with all the strength and fidelity of her girlish nature, was dead—that was enough for once. I had not the heart—I had not the courage even to tell her that he was not her husband, but her betrayer; a being whose memory should be loathed and abhorred, rather than worshipped.'

'There was no necessity for that just now,' said Pauline; 'that announcement can be made

later on, and then can be made more quietly and delicately. What else did you say?

‘I told her when I left her that I would return and take her to London, to-night.’

‘To London! To what part of London?’

‘To Mrs. Calverley’s house, where I was compelled to tell her—her husband’s body was lying. Of course she had heard of Mr. Calverley as her husband’s partner, and with this explanation she seemed content.’

‘Ah, poor creature!’ cried Pauline, ‘she does not know, then, that the body has already been buried?’

‘No, I did not tell her that, and fortunately she did not ask me the date of the death.’

‘And when you made this promise, may I ask what plan was in your mind?’

‘My idea was,’ said Martin, blushing somewhat as the vagueness of this same idea dawned upon him; ‘my idea was, to go to a friend of mine named Statham, a very clever man, kind-hearted, and with a vast knowledge of the world, who has already helped me in this business, and indeed has seen Mrs. — the young

woman I mean—and first gave me the notion that she was not what one might have imagined she would have been.’

‘O, indeed,’ said Pauline, eyeing him closely, ‘this Mr. Statham has seen the poor lady, and finds her thus?’

‘Exactly,’ replied Martin. ‘Well, I thought I would go to Statham and tell him what I had done, and get him to come down with me here this afternoon, and then I thought that between us both we might tell her—tell her—all!’

‘I can imagine how much of the narration would fall to Mr. Statham’s share,’ said Pauline, with a quiet smile. ‘Now, I don’t know Mr. Statham, and cannot therefore judge of his method of treating the subject, but I think I have a better plan to propose, and as it is one in which I assign the principal part to myself, I am perhaps qualified to speak about it.’

‘I am sure,’ said Martin, jumping at the idea of any relief for himself or his friend, ‘that we shall be delighted to enter into it,

provided of course that it is consonant, as I know it will be, with our idea of sparing Mrs. —this lady's feelings as much as possible.'

'For that,' said Pauline, 'you may depend upon me, understanding that is the mainspring of my motive in offering my services to you. As I have told you before, in such matters as these, a woman's delicacy is of course required, and I am convinced that I shall be enabled to do more with her than Mr. Statham, even with all the honesty and astuteness for which you give him credit. My idea is, that you should not return to this place. Your natural candour and straightforwardness prevent your being much of a diplomatist, Monsieur Martin, and it is due to your sacred office that you should be mixed up as little as possible in an affair of this kind. I have but little doubt that the successful commencement of the work is due to your kindness and consideration; but I think its carrying out should now be left to other hands.'

'And those hands are?'

'For the present, mine. Instead of your

going to Rose Cottage this evening, as you have arranged, I propose you should send me as your representative.'

'But you are not known to this poor girl—she will refuse to see you.'

'Not if I bring proper credentials from you. A letter, for instance.'

'A letter; to what effect?'

'Telling her that you are unable to come, and that you have sent me in your place.'

'In my place,' repeated Martin. 'But, as I have told you before, I had arranged with her that she should go to London with me.'

'That arrangement can continue, only the letter should say that she could go with me instead of with you.'

'And what on earth will you do with her when you get her to town?'

'I do not intend taking her to town at all.'

'My dear Madame Du Tertre,' said Martin, looking up, with a shade of annoyance in his face, 'we are evidently playing at cross purposes, and I shall be glad if you will explain yourself to me.'

‘My dear Monsieur Martin, as I told you before, you are too honest and straightforward, not merely to practise diplomacy, but, as I find now, to comprehend it. Armed with this letter from you, I shall go and see this young lady—she will be most anxious to start off at once with me, and I shall make no opposition. On the contrary, I shall express my extreme readiness, but shall suggest that, as she is weak and unnerved by the events of the day, she had better take some restorative. Now, among other odd varieties in my life, I have been a garde-malade, and I know quite sufficient of medicine to enable me to administer to our young friend, with perfect safety and without the remotest chance of doing her any harm, a draught, which, instead of being a restorative, will be a powerful soporific.’

‘Soporific!’ cried Martin, aghast.

‘How wrong of me to have used that word!’ said Pauline, who could not refrain from smiling at the horror-struck expression of his face; ‘it fills your mind with thoughts of castles and spectres and bleeding nuns; it is in truth the

language of romance. I should have said an anodyne, which means exactly the same thing, but being a medical term is more proper for use.'

'Well, but,' said Martin, very little relieved by the explanation, 'the effect will be still the same. This draught, by whatever name you may choose to call it, which you propose to give her, will send her into a deep sleep.'

'Unquestionably.'

'And what is the object of that?'

'The object of that,' cried Pauline, beginning to lose patience, 'the object of that, my dear sir, is to prevent this lady from leaving her house, to give us twenty-four or thirty-six hours, as the case may be, to turn ourselves round in, and see what is best to be done.'

'I do not like it, I confess,' said Martin, hesitating; 'it appears to me a strong proceeding.'

'My good Monsieur Martin, is not the whole affair one which necessitates a strong proceeding, as you call it? The matter seems

to me to stand thus : You have told this young woman that her husband's body is lying at the house in Great Walpole-street ; you have promised that you will take her there this evening. If you do not arrive at the time appointed, she will become suspicious, and go off by herself—with what result we can imagine. If you go there, and decline to take her, making what excuse may occur to you, she, having probably had enough of such excuses already, will go off just the same—she knows the address — with the same result. Suppose you go there determined to reveal the truth ; suppose you tell her that the man whom she worshipped was a villain, that his name was not Claxton, but Calverley, and that she was not his wife ; what do you arrive at ? So far as we are concerned, at exactly the same result. There is a dreadful scene ; she refuses to believe anything you say ; she insists upon going off to Mrs. Calverley ; and there is, to use your charming English expression, all the fat in the fire. You will not accuse me of exaggeration, Monsieur

Martin ; I am representing things exactly as they will happen, am I not ?'

'Upon my word, I believe you are,' said Martin Gurwood ; 'it is a most unfortunate state of affairs, most unfortunate, and I really do not see what we are to do.'

'Wait,' said Pauline, 'until you have heard the result of my proposition, which you condemned so quickly as dangerous. And first, as to the danger. I will guarantee that she shall not suffer in the smallest degree ; but even if you thought the effects of the draught were strong, and it were necessary to call in Doctor Broadbent, we need not object to that, as he would be certain not to betray us. If I am allowed to have my own way, I shall so regulate the strength of the draught that she does not return wholly and entirely to consciousness until after forty-eight hours ; then the story can be told to her of the sudden manner in which she was seized by illness, and she can be informed that while she was in a state of unconsciousness the funeral had taken place. There is nothing extraordin-

ary in these circumstances, which are simple and coherent, and there is no reason to think that her suspicions will be aroused.'

But, though perhaps with less hesitation than before, Martin Gurwood still shook his head. 'I do not like it,' he said; 'it is such an underhand proceeding.'

'What have all your proceedings been since you first found the position in which you were placed with regard to this woman?' asked Pauline. 'This is one of those matters which it is not possible to treat by ordinary means. Bah, Monsieur Martin, let us have no more of this childishness. Will the plan which I propose get you out of the mess in which you are involved?'

'Yes—it seems so—I should think it would—'

'Then leave it to me to carry out.'

'I think I had better consult Mr. Stat-ham in the matter, Madame Du Tertre, if you have no objection,' said Martin. 'You see I have taken his advice already—and could see more—'

‘My good monsieur,’ said Pauline impatiently, ‘I have no objection to your consulting Mr. Statham, or any one for the matter of that, but do you see that time presses? We are already in the afternoon, and it is this evening that action must be taken. I confess I do not see how Mr. Statham can improve upon my proposition.’

‘No,’ said Martin, ‘I do not know that he could.’ His yielding nature was no match for this woman’s determination. ‘Then the best thing I can do is, I suppose, to get back to London?’

‘Yes,’ said Pauline, with a smile; ‘but I must trouble you to take me with you. I have sent away my cabman, and I must see Mrs. Calverley, and make up some story to account to her for the two or three days during which I must necessarily be absent from her. Ah, Monsieur Martin, what a world of deceit it is!’

‘Did you say that you were coming back in my cab, Madame Du Tertre?’ said Martin, looking rather blank.

‘Yes,’ she said with a laugh, ‘I must. I have no other means of getting back to town. But don’t fear, Monsieur Martin; I will bring no disgrace upon you—you shall set me down as soon as we reach the outskirts of town, and I will go to Great Walpole-street by myself. When you get there you must write me the letter to this poor girl; you can give it to me as I come downstairs after my explanation with Mrs. Calverley.’

When Madame Du Tertre walked into the drawing-room in Great Walpole-street, she saw from the expression of Mrs. Calverley’s face that that sainted woman was considerably out of temper. Mrs. Calverley kept her eyes rigidly fixed on her work, and took no notice of Pauline’s entrance.

‘Ah, behold a pleasant woman,’ muttered the Frenchwoman between her teeth. ‘It is well that I have something to look forward to in the future; for the position here is not a particularly pleasant one, and is sufficiently hardly earned.—And how are you this even-

ing, my kind friend?' she said at last, gliding into a chair by Mrs. Calverley's side.

'If you call me your kind friend, I am sorry I cannot return the compliment, Madame Du Tertre,' hissed Mrs. Calverley spitefully. 'I thought the arrangement between us was, that you were to be my companion, and endeavour to cheer me up with some of the liveliness of your nation, at least I know that was suggested by Mr. Calverley when he made the engagement; and instead of that, here I have been left by myself the whole day, without one creature to come and say a word to me.'

'Ah, my kind friend,' said Pauline—'for so you have always proved yourself to me—it is only in a matter of necessity that I would ask to be absent from your side. My poor cousin—she that I spoke about to you—is lying ill at a poor lodging. She has no friend in this wide London, does not know one creature beside myself; she has no money, she cannot speak your language, and is utterly helpless. I am the sole person on

whom she can rely. I have been with her all day ; it is from my hand alone that she will take her medicine and her drink ; and I have come to ask you to excuse me for yet a little while longer, until she has reached the crisis of her malady.'

'It is nothing catching, I hope?' said Mrs. Calverley, pulling her skirts close round her.

'Ah, no ; she is poitrinaire—consumptive, as you call it. I have been talking to her about you, telling her how nobly you have borne your present sorrow, and she is interested about you, my dear friend. She asked permission, when she recovers, to come and see you.'

The coarse compliment acted as was intended, and Pauline received Mrs. Calverley's gracious permission to absent herself for as long as was requisite.

As she came down the stairs she saw Martin Gurwood standing at the study-door. He stepped forward, and without a word placed a letter, addressed to Mrs. Claxton, into her hands.

Then Pauline went to her bedroom, and descending therefrom with a small bag in her hand, hailed a hansom, and for a second time that day was conveyed to Hendon.

In the dusk of the evening, Alice, long since attired in her bonnet and shawl, and waiting eagerly for Martin Gurwood, saw a woman alight at her door. Little Bell, who had been playing about in the garden, saw her too, and running up to Alice, cried, ‘O mamma, you recollect what I told you about the dark lady? She has come again. Here she is at the gate.’

CHAPTER VIII.

SO FAR SUCCESSFUL.

WHEN Martin Gurwood knew that Pauline had started again for Hendon, that there was no possibility of departing from the scheme which she had proposed, and to the carrying into effect of which he had given his reluctant consent, he felt more than ever nervous and uncomfortable. That he had made a great mistake in admitting Madame Du Tertre into his confidence at all, and that he had enormously magnified that error by permitting her to take a leading part in the plot, and to import into it mystery and a positive danger, he knew full well. How he should be able to account for his proceedings to Humphrey Stat- ham, who, he felt sure, would be eminently dissatisfied with all that had been done, he did not know.

That was a wretched evening for Martin

Gurwood. He and his mother dined in solemn state together, and during the repast and afterwards, when they were seated in the vast drawing-room, where Mrs. Calverley's work-table and reading-lamp formed a mere oasis of light in the midst of the great desert of darkness, he had to listen to an unbroken plaint, carried on in an unvaried monotone. 'Was there ever such a life as her's? What had she done that she should be so afflicted? Why was her advice never taken? If it had been, Mr. Gurwood would not have killed himself with drink; Mr. Calverley would have had nothing to do with the ironworks worry, which had undoubtedly caused his death. What was to become of the business? The arrangements made in Mr. Calverley's will sounded all very right and proper, but she very much questioned whether they would be found to work well. Was not too much mastery and power given to Mr. Jeffreys? He had been a confidential clerk certainly, but it was by no means to be argued from that that he would be either as industrious or as useful when placed in com-

mand. She could bear testimony to that from her experience of Mr. Calverley, whom she had known in both positions.' And so on, and so on.

Mrs. Calverley did not require, or indeed expect, any reply to her series of wearisome questions, or comment on her dull string of complaints. She was quite satisfied with the interjectional 'Ah!' 'Well!' and 'Indeed!' which Martin threw in from time to time; and it was well that she required nothing more, for her companion would have been entirely unable to give her a rational answer, or, even had he been called upon to do so, to state what she was talking about. Martin Gurwood's thoughts were at Rose Cottage. Madame Du Tertre must have arrived there by that time; must have seen that poor pretty young creature. A strange woman Madame Du Tertre, and, to his mind, not too trustworthy; but she had expressed kindly feelings towards this girl, and when she saw her, that kindly feeling could not fail to be increased. That was a horrible notion—taking advantage of

her weakness to give her a sleeping draught. He did not like to think of that; and yet he was compelled to admit that he did not see how anything else could have been done. Pauline's possession of their secret was an unpleasant element in the story which he had to tell Statham; but had he not taken her into his confidence he felt that he should have bungled the business which he had undertaken, and that very likely by that time both Mrs. Calverley and the tenant of Rose Cottage would have become acquainted with the positions which they held towards each other. How long they could be kept in ignorance of those positions was a matter of doubt; but for the temporary respite they were indebted to Madame Du Tertre; and Martin thought he would put that very strongly to Humphrey Statham the next morning. His last thoughts before dropping off to sleep were given to Rose Cottage, and in his dreams he saw the pretty pale-faced, tearful girl with the dark-eyed, black-browed woman bending over her.

He expected a letter from Hendon by the

early morning's post, but it was midday before it arrived. Martin sat in the dining-room by himself, anxiously expecting it; he heard the postman's knock resounding through the street, and when it reached the door, he felt an inclination to rush out and clear the letter-box himself. Only one letter was brought in to him by the footman, but he knew at a glance that it was the one he wanted. Martin waited until the servant had left the room before he broke the seal; then he seated himself in the big arm-chair, and read as follows:

'Hendon, Thursday, midnight.

'MY DEAR M. MARTIN,—You will, I know, be most anxious to learn how I have prospered in my undertaking; and I would willingly have given you earlier information had it been possible. As, however, it is advisable to observe secrecy, I shall not intrust a messenger with my letters, but shall send them by the post, and take them to the office myself. This may occasionally cause some slight delay, but it will be surest and safest in the end.

‘By the place from which this letter is dated, you will see that I have carried out my intention. I am writing at a table by her bedside; and as I raise my eyes from the paper they fall upon her lying asleep close by me. Ah, M. Martin, I told you that I was a woman fertile in resources, and generally successful in what I attempt. That there was no vanity or boasting in this, my present position gives, I think, ample proof.

‘But to tell you my story from its commencement. I took the letter which you handed me, and, fortified by the inward feeling that, though you said nothing, you had breathed a silent prayer for my success, I set out once more for the place where we had held our morning’s conversation. On arriving at the gate, I perceived my little playfellow of the morning. Ah, I forgot to mention to you that while you were in the house, and just before you appeared at the dining-room window, I had made acquaintance with a very pretty child, whom I had found playing in the garden, and had ingratiated myself with her by return-

ing the ball which she had thrown to my side of the hedge. It is part of the scheme of my life, M. Martin, to ingratiate myself with everybody; some day they may have an opportunity of making themselves useful to me.

‘Behold an exact example of this in the present instance! The child saw me at once, and ran forward to announce my arrival to her mother. Had I in the morning been cross or ungracious, had I made a bad impression, that impression would have been communicated by the child, and my reception would at once have been compromised. As it was, the child cried out, “The dark lady has come again; here she is at the gate;” and went on to mention my having returned the ball, and spoken pleasantly to her. I heard this, for by that time I had walked up the garden, and was close by the door. There she stood in the porch, her bonnet and shawl on, her head bent eagerly forward, peering into the dusk. She was waiting for you, M. Martin, and so intent was she on your coming, that she seemed unable to think of anything else. My arrival

did not impress her at all; until I mentioned your name she scarcely looked at or listened to me.

‘The name roused her at once. Where were you? she asked. You had promised to be there more than an hour ago to take her to London. Why did I speak of you? What brought me there?’

‘My morning’s adventure with the child served me just then. I said—do not be angry, M. Martin, I was compelled to make some excuse—I said that I was the wife of your brother (I would have said your sister, but my French accent would have betrayed me); that I had been with you there in the morning, to be ready in case my services were needed; that while you entered the house I remained outside and talked with the child, as she had already heard; that I had come direct from you that evening, and that I was the bearer of a letter which would explain my errand.

“A letter!” she cried. “Then he is not coming?”

“The letter will show you, madame, that

he cannot come, but that he has sent me to take his place, and to act precisely as he would have done."

'She looked disappointed, but she took the letter, and walking into the little hall, where a light was burning, read it eagerly. Then she said, "You know the contents, madame. Mr. Gurwood says that you, instead of him, will be my guide—let us start at once."

'I suppose she saw something in my face, for she changed colour almost immediately, and said that she begged my pardon, that she was acting very inhospitably, and that I doubtless required some refreshment after my drive. Not refreshment, I told her, but rest. Five minutes would make very little difference to her. If she would allow me to sit down for that time, I should be ready to start at its expiration. She didn't like the delay, poor child; I saw that plainly enough; but she was too kind, too well-bred to refuse, and she took me into the dining-room and rang for wine.

'I was glad to hear her give this order,

partly because I stood in great need of refreshment myself, for I had had no chance of taking any in Walpole-street, but principally because ever since my arrival I had been wondering how I should find an opportunity of administering that little draught, upon the action of which my hopes for successfully carrying out our plans depended. You know my original idea was to give her this draught under the guise of a restorative; but when once I saw her, I allowed to myself that this plan would not do. Partly from the glimpse I had caught of her at the dining-room window, partly from your description, I had presupposed her to be a weak, irresolute creature, capable of being easily swayed, glad to accept any suggestion without deliberating whether it might be for her good or her harm; a pretty fool, in fact.

Mrs. Claxton—it is a nice-sounding name, and one may as well call her by it as by any other—is pretty and delicate, but by no means weak; and any person who would attempt to influence her must have an exceptionally

strong will. I saw this at a glance, and recognised the fact, that being, as she is, quick-witted, her suspicions might be aroused, in which case there would be an end to our scheme. It was necessary, therefore, to try other tactics, and I was beating my brain for them, when the entrance of the servant with the wine and glasses gave me the requisite clue. The poor girl, with trembling hand, poured me out a glass of wine, and then left the room to fetch some biscuits, for which I had ventured to ask. I took the opportunity of her absence to pour some wine into the other glass, and to fill it up with the contents of the little bottle I had brought in my bag. The liquid was colourless and tasteless; and though I half smiled to myself as I emptied it into the wine-glass, the action reminding me as it did of the heroines of M. Eugène Sue's novels, or of the Porte St. Martin dramas, I knew well enough that its result, though sufficient for our purpose, would be harmless.

‘Mrs. Claxton returned with the biscuits. “See,” said I, pointing to the glass, “I have

poured out some wine for you. You have passed a day of intense excitement, and have still a most trying ordeal to go through; you will need to have all your courage and all your wits about you. Drink this, it will give you strength. She smiled feebly,—such a desolate, dreary smile,—but made no objection; on the contrary, “She had had nothing all day,” she said, “and thought that the wine might do her good.” So she took the glass and quietly swallowed its contents.

I suppose if you had been there, M. Martin, you would have expected to see the girl drop down, her eyes closed, her senses gone? That is the way in the novels and the drama, but that is not the effect of the little tisane which I have more than once had occasion to prepare. That effect never varies. Mrs. Claxton watched me with apparent interest as I was eating my biscuit, and, though she said nothing, she seemed perfectly to understand me when I proposed to go. At that moment, seeing the nurse pass by the window, carrying the little child, who was being

taken to bed, I beckoned to her. The woman opened the door, and I had just said to her, "Please tell my cabman we are coming out," when Mrs. Claxton sank backwards in her chair. I had been anticipating this; so bidding the nurse carry the child away, and send one of the other servants to me, I bent over the poor girl, and with the aid of the housemaid, who speedily arrived, went through the usual restorative processes which are employed with persons who are supposed to have swooned. While these, which I need scarcely say were of no effect, were being carried on, I learned from the servant that, owing to the news which had been brought to her by the clergyman that morning, her mistress had been in a dreadful low state all day, and that the wonder of the household was that she had kept up so long. This state of things exactly favouring my purpose, I soon disposed of the idea which had been started by the nurse, that Doctor Broadbent should be sent for; and when I had had the poor girl carried up-stairs, my announcement

that I should instal myself as nurse, and pass the night by her bedside, excited no great surprise.

‘Lying there, with her long hair floating over the pillow, her features tranquil and composed, her breathing soft and regular, she is very beautiful! So beautiful that I can quite understand the dead man being in love with her. So beautiful that, were I writing to anyone but you, M. Martin, I should say I could almost forgive him for it. Meanwhile, it is satisfactory to us to think that the respite which we have gained by her inaction is purchased at the cost of no pain or ill suffered by her. Her sleep is as sound and as health-giving as though it had been natural, and there is no doubt that the rest will really be of service to her in serving as a preparation for the troubled time to come.

‘So here ends my bulletin. What events to-morrow may have in store for us, of course I know not; but I think that the patient will sleep for at least another twenty-four hours, and I knew you would be desirous to hear as

soon as possible of her state. If you have anything to say to me, you can send it safely by letter; but if I do not hear from you, I shall hold to the plan which we arranged together.

‘Your friend,

‘PALMYRE DU TERTRE.

‘*Six a.m.*

‘P.S.—I have kept my letter open till now. She still remains in the same state.’

The emotions experienced by Martin Gurwood when he arrived at the conclusion of this lengthy epistle were so conflicting, that he thought it advisable to give as little personal consideration to the matter as possible, and to lose no time in submitting his story and the letter to Humphrey Statham, and obtaining that clear-headed friend’s advice upon both.

On arriving at ‘Change Alley, and revealing himself to the gaze of Mr. Collins, Martin was surprised to find that confidential crea-

ture brighten up at his approach, and to hear him express pleasure at his arrival.

‘Glad to see you, Mr. Gurwood,’ he said. ‘Perhaps now you have come, the governor will be a little easier in his mind. He has been in and out of the room half a dozen times in the day for the last three days, asking us all if we were quite sure that you had not been, and giving directions that you were to be sent in to him directly you arrived. I will go in and tell him at once.’

The chief-clerk passed into his principal’s room, and returned immediately. ‘You are to go in,’ he said: and the next moment Humphrey Statham had Martin Gurwood by the hand.

‘Here at last!’ he cried. ‘I have been expecting you from hour to hour—what on earth has detained you?’

‘Nothing. I came as quickly as I could—directly I had anything to say; as I will prove to you in a minute. But what has made you so strangely anxious?’

‘My dear fellow, I am anxious about any-

thing in which I take an interest, and I have taken an interest in this matter. Now to the point. You have seen this lady?’

‘I have.’

‘And you have broken the truth to her; explained to her the fearful position in which she stands?’

‘I have not.’

‘Gurwood!’ said Humphrey Statham, taking a pace backward, and looking steadily at his friend. ‘Is this the way in which you have discharged your mission? Did you not undertake —’

‘Wait and hear me before you condemn,’ cried Martin, raising his hand in appeal. ‘I am as weak as water—no one knows that better than myself—but I had made up my mind to go through with this duty, and I would have done so, had it not been for circumstances against which I could not struggle. Have you never heard me mention the name of Madame Du Tertre?’

‘Madame Du Tertre?’ repeated Humphrey, somewhat astonished at what he ima-

gined to be his friend's sudden branching off from the subject. 'No, I have never heard the name.'

'She is a Frenchwoman, who, through some strange influence, I never knew exactly what, has been acting as my mother's companion for some little time, living in the house in Great Walpole-street, and being, in fact, half friend, half servant—you comprehend the position?'

Humphrey Statham bowed his head in acquiescence.

'She is a woman of great strength of character—little as I know of the world I am able to see that—and has not merely obtained a vast influence over my mother, but, as I now believe, she has made herself thoroughly acquainted with most of our private affairs.'

'You don't mean to say that she knows—?'

'Wait and hear me. This woman, from something that occurred during Mrs. Calverley's lifetime, seems to have entertained some

suspicion of the Claxton mystery. The morning after his death, when I happened to be alone in the room with her, she found some means of alluding to some partnership in the house at Mincing-lane, and of introducing the name of Claxton. I tried to pass the thing off as lightly as I could, but I was horribly confused, and I daresay I made a mess of it; at all events her suspicions were not abated; for when I came out of Rose Cottage, after my first interview with that poor creature, I found this Frenchwoman waiting for me close by the gate.'

'She had followed you to Hendon, then,' cried Statham. 'What explanation did you give for your being there?'

'What explanation could I give? Even though I had designed to tell a lie, I could not have framed one calculated to have escaped her detection.'

'Do you mean to say, then, that this intriguing Frenchwoman, who is in Mrs. Calverley's confidence, knows all?'

'All!'

Humphrey Statham shrugged his shoulders, plunged his hands into his trousers-pockets, and sank back into his chair with the air of a man for whom life has no farther interest.

‘You cannot realise my position,’ cried Martin. ‘It was with this very power that she possesses over Mrs. Calverley that she threatened me. And she has expressed her willingness to aid us in our plans, provided I do not interfere with her management of my mother.’

‘If anything were to be said to her it would have been well to tell her all,’ said Humphrey Statham; ‘a half-confidence is always a mistake. So this charming creature knows all about the double mystery of Calverley and Claxton, and promises to render us assistance in our endeavours to do the best for all persons concerned! Well, it is a most confounded nuisance that she knows anything about it; but as it is, I don’t know that she may not be made useful.’

‘She has made herself useful already,’ said

Martin Gurwood. 'You ought not to have sent me on this errand, which I was utterly unfit to fulfil. I saw this poor girl, and, as kindly as I could, told her of the death of this man—her husband, as I called him—but when she pressed to be taken to him, imagining that he was only just dead, I was entirely nonplussed, and knew not what to say. You had given me no instructions on that head, you know.'

'By Jove, no; that was an omission,' said Statham, rubbing his head. 'How did you manage?'

'After a struggle I told her that the body was lying at Mr. Calverley's house in Great Walpole-street, and that as she did not know Mrs. Calverley, it would be necessary to apprise that lady of her visit. So I left her, promising to return in the evening and take her with me. It was then I met Madame Du Tertre.'

'Well, what did she say?'

'She said that my plan was absurd, and that it was all-important that the actual state

of things should be kept from Mrs. Claxton for some time longer.'

'She was right in both instances,' said Humphrey Statham, nodding. 'But how did she propose to do it? I confess I don't see my way.'

'How she has done it you will perceive by this letter, which I have just received.'

Martin handed Pauline's letter to his friend, and watched him keenly as he perused it.

Humphrey Statham read the document through with great attention. Only twice he showed symptoms of astonishment—once by his uplifted eyebrows, once by a low but prolonged whistle. When he had finished reading the letter, he still retained it in his hand.

'She is a clever woman, by Jove!' he said, 'and a thoroughly unscrupulous one; this letter shows that. I don't like this sleeping-draught business; that is a remarkably awkward feature in the case, though it seems to be going on all well, and it certainly is giving us the time we required. When this poor

girl wakes, you and I must both of us be present to tell her plainly the truth ; you in your clerical capacity, and I—well—in my worldly capacity, I suppose. “Very beautiful,” eh?’ he said, referring to the letter. ‘She is very beautiful. A soft, touching kind of beauty which appeals to me more than any other. And the child,’ he continued, again glancing at the letter. ‘You remarked that I took special interest in this matter, Gurwood ! You would scarcely fancy now that that child is the link between me and the Claxton mystery !’

‘The child!’ cried Martin Gurwood. ‘How is that?’

‘I will tell you the story some day,’ said Statham, looking moodily into the fire. ‘Depend upon it, my friend, not every woman who is betrayed is so mercifully deceived as this poor creature has been !’

CHAPTER IX.

THE SMALL HOURS IN LONDON.

MARTIN GURWOOD and Humphrey Statham dined together that day at a club, of which the latter was a member, and sat together until late in the night, discussing memories of old times and the strange occurrences of recent days. When Martin returned to Great Walpole-street, he was surprised to learn from the servant who let him in, that Mrs. Calverley had not retired to rest, and that she desired to speak with him when he came in. A guilty pang shot through Martin's breast as he listened. What could be the meaning of this? Could his mother have discovered the secret of the Hendon mystery, and was she waiting to objurgate him for the part which he had taken in concealing it from her? Mar-

tin knew that, some day or other, such a contingency would arise, but he hoped that when it did he would have Statham by his side. He looked to Statham now for advice and assistance in every phase which the matter could assume, and dreaded being left to his own resources.

He found his mother in her bedroom, attired in a skimpy flannel dressing-gown, and sitting before the fire with her slippered feet upon the fender. She looked round on his opening the door, and uttered a sound which was partly a snort of defiance, and partly a groan of resignation.

‘You wish to see me, mother, James tells me,’ said Martin. ‘I had no idea you would have been up, or I would have returned home sooner.’

‘I wish to see somebody, Martin,’ returned Mrs. Calverley querulously. ‘I thought that my life could not have been more wretched and solitary than it was in Mr. Caverley’s time, but even he used to come home occasionally, while now I sit by myself from morning till

night. Persons who are engaged and paid to be my companions go away, and even my son gives himself up to his own devices, and does not come home until close upon midnight.'

'My dear mother,' said Martin, 'as I said before, if I had had any idea that you were sitting up, I would have returned sooner. Tell me now,' he said, pulling his chair close to hers, 'what do you want me to do?'

'Nothing,' replied Mrs. Calverley; 'I never want any one to do anything for me. But I wanted to talk to you, if you can spare a few minutes to such an unimportant person as myself, about the future.'

'She knows nothing about Hendon,' thought Martin to himself, 'or she would not have been able to have kept off from the subject for a minute.' And greatly relieved at this idea, he said pleasantly, 'You know, mother, that I should be only too glad to carry out any of your wishes.'

'And you will have an opportunity of proving what you say, Martin. You know

that by Mr. Calverley's will I am now absolute mistress of the business in Mincing-lane. On our marriage, Mr. Calverley, in what I considered then the most ungenerous manner, reserved to himself the power of disposing of that business as he thought best; but I suppose he afterwards came into a better frame of mind, for he has left it entirely to me. The business as it stands at present will, I learn from Mr. Jeffreys, bring me in a very large income. Now I am the last woman in the world to set an undue value upon riches, and my only care for them is that they may enable me to do more good to my fellow-creatures. Are you attending to me, Martin?' she said to her son, who was looking vacantly into the fire.

'Certainly, mother,' said Martin, starting.

'Perhaps you will favour me with your particular attention just now,' said Mrs. Calverley, with some asperity, 'when I tell you that what I have got to say concerns yourself. If your character were different, you might

think to yourself that, rich as I shall be, I might take the opportunity of making you independent, but such I know would not be your wish. You are one of those who rightly think that it is your mission to discharge your duty in the state of life to which you have been called, and I agree with you. There is to me no more beautiful sight than that of a minister engaged in the exercise of his vocation; the only change I would propose to you would be one in the scene of your labours.'

'A change in the scene?' cried Martin.

'Exactly,' answered Mrs. Calverley. 'I should wish you to relinquish the vicarage of Lullington, and to establish yourself in London.'

'In London?' cried Martin.

'Certainly,' said his mother; 'where there is money there is influence, and there would not, I imagine, be any difficulty in obtaining for you an incumbency in London; or if it came to that, there are always proprietary chapels to be purchased, and in them perhaps

you would be more unfettered, and more able to conduct the services according to your own views.'

'But, my dear mother,' said Martin, 'I am by no means sure—'

'That you would be popular,' interrupted Mrs. Calverley. 'You need not fear about that. I fancy there are few better judges of preaching than myself, and I have always been satisfied with the sermons which I have heard you deliver. It would be a great pleasure to me to know that my son's merits were properly recognised. And I don't think,' she added with a slight toss of her head, 'that he would have any reason to be ashamed of his mother, or the style in which she lived. We may not be aristocrats, and our lives may not be attended by the sloth, luxury, and pomp which surround that portion of the community; but for solid wealth and the comfort which it brings, the home which has been raised by British industry need be surpassed by none.'

Mrs. Calverley paused; and Martin, for

want of something better to say, said, 'Of course, mother, I quite agree with you.'

'My notion,' pursued his mother, 'is that you should live with me, and act as my right hand in all matters of business, and as a dispenser of my charity. My life has been one long martyrdom ; it has pleased Heaven to afflict me with two unworthy husbands, men incapable of understanding those finer feelings which I possess, and which have been the sole means of lightening the burden laid upon me. I hope I may now be permitted in some degree to recompense myself for the solitude and submission in which I have lived, and to have a little sunshine at the close of a life which has been one long sacrifice for others. I hope that—Martin, Martin, what are you thinking of?'

What was he thinking of, as he sat there with his chin resting on his hands, and his eyes fixed intently on the fire? What were those words ringing in his ears—solitude, submission, sacrifice? Ah, how hollow and empty they sounded, these querulous com-

plaints, this Pharisaical self-laudation, when he thought of the manner in which, under the influence of his wife's temper, John Calverley's life had been warped and twisted until his weak nature had been betrayed into the commission of a fearful crime, the result of which was yet impending over the head of that poor trusting girl ! What was he thinking of ? Of the little right he had in the thought even then floating through his mind, to condemn the dead man whose power of will had been so weak, whose temptation had been so strong ! Who was he, to gauge and measure another man's sins, and to preach the doctrine of resistance, when— 'What was he thinking of ?' Mrs. Calverley's words repeated for the third time recalled him from his reverie.

'What was I thinking of ? Why, of course of the proposition you have just made to me, mother,' he said aloud.

'It is one which scarcely seems to me to need much reflection,' said Mrs. Calverley coldly. 'In making it I have, as usual, not

considered myself, but left the advantages wholly to you.'

'Of course, mother, I fully appreciate your kindness,' said Martin; 'and the mere fact of living with you, and being able to relieve the solitude under which you suffer, would, of course, have much weight with me. By the way, you were alluding just now to Madame Du Tertre's absence. I have never hitherto had an opportunity of asking you how she first became an inmate of this house.'

'Not through any invitation of mine,' said Mrs. Calverley; 'though I am bound to say that as soon as she came here she saw the melancholy life I led, and endeavoured to alleviate it to the best of her power. One of the few things I have to thank Mr. Calverley for is his introduction of Madame Du Tertre.'

'O,' said Martin, looking very much astonished; 'it was through Mr. Calverley that you made her acquaintance?'

'Certainly,' said his mother. 'I went down to Mincing-lane one day, and found Madame

Du Tertre closeted with Mr. Calverley in his private room. I thought they would be confused at my entrance; but Mr. Calverley, quite at his ease, presented his companion to me as a French lady, a widow with a small fortune, which she had brought to him to invest. He stated, at the same time, that she was a stranger in London, and without friends, and suggested that, as he was compelled to be much away—compelled, indeed!’ repeated Mrs. Calverley, with a sniff of defiance—‘it might break the solitude of my life if this French lady, a cheerful person, playing the piano, and that sort of thing, came to live with me as my companion.’

‘O, that was what Mr. Calverley proposed,’ said Martin reflectively. ‘And you agreed to it?’

‘I agreed to it as a temporary measure,’ said Mrs. Calverley; ‘but it seemed to work well, and has continued ever since.’

‘You had never seen Madame Du Tertre before? never heard Mr. Calverley mention her name?’

‘Certainly not; neither the one nor the other. What on earth makes you ask these questions, Martin?’

But Martin had fallen back again into his chair. His eyes were once more riveted on the fire, and his ears were deaf to his mother’s voice. What a curious woman his mother was! How weak, even in the grim obstinacy on which she prided herself! how liable to be deceived, in spite of all the suspicion which she exhibited! This Madame Du Tertre, then, had been introduced into the house by Mr. Calverley, and his mother had accepted her as her companion on the very slight evidence of the story which Mr. Calverley had told her, and which might have been concocted between him and the Frenchwoman a few minutes before her arrival.

What had been Madame Du Tertre’s object in seeking for an introduction into this house? What could be her motive for allying herself with such a woman as Mrs. Calverley? Whatever motive it might have been, it was still in existence, for had she not made it a

condition of assisting him with Alice that he would not interfere with her plans as regarded his mother? What could those plans be? Madame Du Tertre was not a mere wretched creature sponging upon any one who would befriend her, and earning with fulsome adulation her nightly shelter and her daily bread. She had money of her own, as he understood; not much, indeed, but sufficient to provide her with the necessaries of life; and she was the last woman in the world to give up her freedom, and to go in for mere vulgar mercenary scheming for a material home with such a person as Mrs. Calverley, to endure the position of companion in the grim house in Great Walpole-street. She must have something large at stake, must be actuated by some ulterior motive of vast importance. What can that motive be? Who is she? Where did she come from? When and how commenced her acquaintance with Mr. Calverley?

‘What on earth makes you ask these questions, Martin?’

The harsh grating voice recalled him to

himself, but even then he was at first a little dazed.

‘These questions? What questions? O, I recollect; about Madame Du Tertre. Merely curiosity, mother; I could not possibly have any other motive.’

‘Well, now that I have satisfied your curiosity, and told you all I know—which was little enough, for Mr. Calverley was reticent towards me in that as in all other matters of his life—now that I have done my best to give you this information, perhaps you will be good enough to return to the subject which I started, and tell me what you think about my proposition.’

‘You won’t expect me to give you a definite answer at once, mother? Such a step as leaving one’s parish, with all its old friends and associations, and wholly changing the sphere of one’s duties, requires much consideration.’

‘I should think when the advantages which are offered to you are properly weighed, you would not be very long in making up your

mind. There are few young men circumstanced as you are—and you must be good enough to remember that you have nothing but your living to depend upon—who have such a chance offered to them. I have often noticed with great pain that you are devoid of any ambition in your profession, and are quite content to live among farmers and people of that kind. But that is not the sort of life I choose for my son. It is my wish that you should come up to town, as I have said before; that you should live here, and take up a proper position in society; that you should marry, and—'

'Yes, mother,' said Martin, with a faint smile, putting up his hand in protest; 'but surely, as I said before, these are matters which require a little consideration. By the way, supposing this plan of yours were carried out, what do you propose to do with Madame Du Tertre?'

'Madame Du Tertre again!' cried Mrs. Calverley. 'Bless my soul, Martin, how you do harp upon that woman! one would really

think that you had fallen in love with her yourself. A nice daughter-in-law she'd make; only if you're going to marry her I would rather you would keep in the country, if you please; she would quite shine at Lullington.'

Mrs. Calverley gave vent to a low sardonic chuckle, the nearest approach she ever made to a laugh; but Martin Gurwood looked very grave.

'I do not understand the point of the joke,' he said; 'it is perhaps because I have been for some years accustomed only to the society of Lullington; but I confess I do not see anything particularly odd in my inquiring what was to become of one who is now a prominent member in your household, after you had carried out the change which you propose to make in it.'

Mrs. Calverley was always a little afraid of her son, and there was something in the tone of his voice as he made this remark which constrained her to be civil.

'I did not mean anything unpleasant,' she

said, with less than her usual rigidity of manner; 'I only thought it odd that you could be in any doubt about the matter. Madame Du Tertre is here as my hired companion—when I say is here, I should say ought to be, for I hold her absence just now to be quite unjustifiable—and when it suits my convenience, and I have quite done with her, I shall pay and dismiss her, as such persons are usually paid and dismissed.'

'You will?'

'Most certainly! You cannot imagine for an instant that I had any idea of attaching Madame Du Tertre to the new manner of life which I propose for myself and for you?'

Martin's thoughts were beginning to wander again. 'No, no, of course not,' he said half vacantly.

'Of course not,' repeated Mrs. Calverley. 'I consented to receive Madame Du Tertre as my companion because I was shamefully deserted by Mr. Calverley, and left to pass all my time in moping solitude. I made a home,

and a comfortable home, for him, and though, as I have said before, he could not appreciate the finer feelings of my nature, I would have been content to put them on one side. Now, I look forward to a very different state of things. You will be my companion; I shall have you instead of Mr. Calverley to deal with, and you will be able to understand my ways of life, and I shall be able to help you in your career. Under these circumstances Madame Du Tertre would merely be a clog upon both of us. 'I am by no means sure, Martin,' said Mrs. Calverley, growing very stiff and speaking with great fervour—'I am by no means sure that it is a right thing to have a Frenchwoman in the house, even though she is a Huguenot; I have experienced it already on several occasions, when I have found the greatest difficulty in convincing the neighbours that she belonged to the reformed Church. And with you as a clergyman permanently resident in the house, a suspicion of that kind would be extremely unpleasant. Moreover, there are many other reasons which

I think would render Madame Du Tertre's farther sojourn here particularly undesirable, and as she is merely one of the household, it will be of course easy enough for me to rid myself of her when I wish. You seem very sleepy, Martin,' said his mother, perceiving that he had relapsed into his former absent condition, 'and I think you had better go to bed now that I have given you an outline of my plan, and it is for you to think it over, and see how it will suit you. If you agree to it, as I have no reason to doubt you will, I shall give Madame Du Tertre notice to leave directly after her return.'

Then Martin rose from his seat, touched with his lips his mother's ear, which she turned round to him for the purpose, and retired to his own room.

Once there he put on his dressing-gown and slippers, flung himself into an arm-chair, and resumed at his ease the chain of thought which had been so frequently interrupted. But now it contained a new element, which had been imported into it by his

mother's last words. Immediately Madame Du Tertre returned to the house she would receive notice that her services would be speedily dispensed with. What would be the Frenchwoman's feelings at such an intimation? She had given no sign of any intention to leave her present quarters in Great Walpole-street; but, on the contrary, seemed to consider herself completely settled there for some time to come, and was unquestionably desirous of retaining her power over Mrs. Calverley. That, Martin recollected, she had not scrupled to acknowledge to him. On the other hand, inexperienced as Martin was in matters of the world, he had sufficient tact to perceive that his mother, for her own purposes, had always been particularly civil to Madame Du Tertre, and both by her speeches and her actions had led the Frenchwoman to believe that her presence in Great Walpole-street was indispensable to the well-being of the household. When, then, Madame Du Tertre on her return from Hendon is informed by Mrs. Calverley that different arrangements are about to

be made, under which her companionship will be no longer required, when she receives that which, no matter how much politeness is imported into the manner of giving it, is in fact her dismissal, will she not, with that shrewdness and suspicion which are so eminently characteristic of her, at once define that this is not the act of Mrs. Calverley, who has always hitherto been so partial to her, but that this conduct on his mother's part is due to his influence? And provided that she attaches importance to the retention of her position in the Great Walpole-street household, as Martin undoubtedly believes she does, will she not instantly seek to revenge herself for what she imagines to be his interference, and has she not a subject for her vengeance immediately to her hand in poor helpless Alice?

Who was this woman? What were the motives prompting her to the game she was playing? And what would be its result?

The future seemed all dark and vague. The mist hung over it as it did over the sleeping city, a shivering glance at which Martin

took from his bedroom window, and saw the first streaks of the wintry dawn struggling fitfully through the black clouds ere he retired to rest.

CHAPTER. X.

THE SMALL HOURS IN HENDON.

ONE o'clock tolled out from the tower of Hendon church as Pauline, who, wearied out by the events of the day, had fallen sound asleep in her chair, opened her eyes, sat upright, and, after an involuntary shudder, quietly rose to her feet and approached the bed.

Alice still slept peacefully; her breathing was quiet and regular, and her unruffled brow and motionless lips proved that she was not disturbed by haunting dreams. Pauline bent over the slumbering figure, took up the arm that lay outside the coverlet, and softly felt its pulse, bent her ear towards the sleeper's mouth to listen to her respiration, and then, stealing back to her place as noiselessly as she had approached, threw herself into her chair,

and indulged in the luxury of a long but silent yawn.

‘There,’ she said to herself, rubbing her eyes, and resuming her usual comfortable attitude, ‘I was right in not denying myself the pleasure of that slumber which I found coming over me, for I am thoroughly refreshed, and equal to very much more than I was before. What a day it has been, my faith! And how wonderfully everything has gone exactly as I could have wished it! This woman sleeping straight on, steadily and tranquil, and without a break; the servants accepting me in the position which I took up so promptly, without a murmur, and only too glad to find the responsibility transferred from themselves to some one else. Responsibility? That reminds me of that sly doctor—how do they call him?—Broadbent! It was right of me to send for him; it might have seemed suspicious had I not done so; and as I knew so well that he had been perforce admitted into the mystery of Claxton-Calverley, and as I had learned from the servants here that he was always

most friendly and kind to this poor doll, I knew that I could explain to him what I had done, and leave it to him to put the people here at their ease. He was out, though, this sly rogue—out, and not expected back until the evening, so they said, though five minutes afterwards I saw a man, who must have been he—black-clothed, grave, the very semblance of an apothecary—come out of the side-door of his garden, and hurry down the path where I stood when I first saw the child. Ah, ha! he has no longer any desire to visit Rose Cottage, this medico so respectable; he fears lest his name should be compromised. I could not help laughing as I saw him creep down the path.

‘Let me see. I am rested now, and my head is quite clear. Last night there was danger of interruption from the servants, and they have been in and out all day, but now they are thoroughly wearied out, and I have the house to myself. Now is the time for me to look about me, and gain what information I can concerning this young woman’s previous

life. I think I saw a box or desk of some kind by the side of the dressing-table. O, yes, here it is. What a funny old box!' Pauline walked to the dressing-table, stooped, and from underneath the muslin cover drew forth an old-fashioned writing-desk, made of mahogany, and bound with brass, with a small brass plate on the middle of its lid, on which were engraved the letters 'A. D.' This inscription caught Pauline's eyes as she took up the desk and placed it on the table by the bedside, within the rays of the shaded lamp.

'A. D.,' she muttered to herself. 'What does that mean? It ought undoubtedly to have been A. C. Ah, stay; the box is old-fashioned, and has seen much service. It is probably the desk of her childhood, that she had before what she thought to be her marriage, when the letters of her name were A. D. A. D.' repeated Pauline, reflecting. 'Ah, bah! It is a coincidence, nothing more.' From her pocket she took two bunches of keys, one large, evidently belonging to the housekeeping, the other small and neat. From the smaller bunch

she made two or three selections, and at last hit upon the key that opened the desk.

The contents of the desk were two packets of letters, one large, one small, each tied round with faded ribbon, two or three loose sheets of blotting-paper, an old diary, and an account-book. Pauline took the larger packet in her hand, and untied the string. The letters slipped asunder: they were all written in the same hand, all addressed to 'Miss Durham, care of J. Preston, Esquire, Heslington-road, York.'

'Miss Durham!' A mist seemed to come over Pauline's sight, and she rubbed her eyes quickly to clear it away. Miss Durham! And A. D. on the lid of the desk? Good Heaven! had all the anguish of mind which she had endured, all the jealousy and rage, all the plotting and planning which she had carried on for the last few months, had all these sprung from an unfounded suspicion, from an absurd creation of her own distorted fancy? Miss Durham! There it was plain enough, in a hand that Pauline recognised as Mr. Calverley's. The letters were those addressed by

him to Alice before their marriage, were signed 'John Claxton,' and were so bright and buoyant, so full of affectionate enthusiasm, that Pauline could scarcely imagine they were the productions of the staid, grave man whom she had known. Miss Durham! What could it mean? Stay! There was the other packet. In an instant that was undone, and Pauline had seized from it one of the letters. And then there was no more to learn, for at a glance she saw that they were in her husband's handwriting, that they were addressed to his 'Dearest Alice,' by her 'Loving brother, Tom.'

The paper dropped from Pauline's hand to the floor, and she sank into her chair with something like a sense of shame upon her. It was then as she had just thought. She had been frightened, as it were, by her own shadow, had herself created the bugbear before which she had fled, or against which she had fought; she had been befooled by her own suspicions, and her foolish fancy had allowed her to be jealous of Tom's sister.

Tom's sister! The pale-faced girl lying

there, sleeping on so peacefully and unconsciously, was Tom's sister. How could she be supposed to have guessed that? She had seen the girl in Tom's embrace, had seen her bathed in tears and inconsolable at Tom's departure; how could she know that this was his sister, of whose existence she had never been informed?

Why had Tom never taken her into his confidence on that point? Why had he never told her that he had a sister of whom he was so fond? Why? And a fierce pang of anger shot through her, and her face drew dark and hard as the reply rose in her mind. She knew the reason well enough—it was because her husband was ashamed of her; ashamed of the unscrupulousness, of the underhand ways, which he was ready enough to use and to call into play when they could be of service to him; because he thought her not good enough to associate with his gentle, womanly, silly little sister, or to appreciate the stupid comfort of the narrow proprieties of her home. Her home! What if Tom could see that home

now, and could know the truth about his sister, as she lay there, with no name, no home, no position, a person for her, his distrusted wife, to patronise and befriend if she chose!

So this was the trust he had placed in her, his wife, his ally, his colleague, of whose fertile brain and ready hand he had so often boasted. This one honest honourable association (as he had imagined it) he had kept hidden from her. And as this thought germinated and broadened in Pauline's mind her feelings passed into a new channel. She who had been her husband's adviser so long, and who had served him so well; she who had fondly imagined herself the trusted confidante and sharer of his inmost thoughts, now found that she had been slighted and considered not worthy to associate with this innocent piece of prettiness. The strange nature of the woman was roused to deadly retrospective anger, and the kindly contemptuous liking which she had begun to feel for Alice faded away.

This pale-faced sleeping girl was her successful rival, though not in the manner she

had at first supposed. She had felt an instinctive hatred of her when she saw her on the platform at Southampton, and her instinct never betrayed her. Tom Durham's sister! Pauline remembered that when her husband spoke of his early days, and the inmates of his home, it was always with a softened voice and manner, and with a certain implied respect, as though he were scarcely fitted, through his present surroundings and mode of life, even to mention so sacred a subject. This pale-faced girl had been one of those associations; she was too pure and too innocent, forsooth, to be mixed up with such society as her brother's wife was forced to keep. She, when she recovered her consciousness, would find herself a mark for the finger of scorn, a text for the Pharisee, a pariah, and an outcast.

And so that weak, clinging, brainless thing was Tom Durham's sister, and preferred by him to his wife, with her grasp of mind and energy of purpose? The wife was to slave with him, and for him, to do the rough work,

to be sent off here and there, travelling night and day, to lie to such a woman, to flatter such a man, to be always vigilant and patient, and to be punished with black looks, and sometimes with curses, if anything went wrong; while from the sister all difficulties and dangers were to be fended off, she was to be lapped in luxury, and her simplicity and innocence were to be as strictly guarded as though she had been a demoiselle in a convent.

Well, Pauline thought, the new phase of circumstances need not cause much alteration in the line of conduct she had marked out for herself. The girl lying there was to her in a different position from what she had imagined. So far as she was concerned, there was no question of revenge now, but it would be as well to keep watch over her, and use her as a tool if occasion should arise. The interest which Martin Gurwood felt in Alice would induce him to keep up his acquaintance with her, and to be en rapport with Martin Gurwood was Pauline's fixed intention. Over

him she had obtained a strong influence, which she did not intend to give up, while the knowledge that she continued to be acquainted with all that was going on would deprive Martin, or those friends of his of whom he thought so much—this Mr. Statham for instance—from attempting to interfere with the exercise of her power over Mrs. Calverley.

And now, for the first time since she had waited for her husband at the Lymington station, Pauline began to believe that the conjecture which she had seen printed in the newspapers had some foundation, and that Tom Durham was really dead. Hitherto she had imagined that he had deceived her, as he had deceived the rest of the world; that the tale which he told her of his intention to dive from the steamer at night, to swim to the shore, and to meet her the next morning, had been merely trumped up in order to turn her off the scent, and to prevent her from tracing him in his flight with the woman of whom he had taken such an affectionate

farewell at the Southampton railway station. But the identity of that woman with Alice Claxton being now settled, and it being made perfectly clear that she was Tom Durham's sister, all motive for that worthy's concealment of himself was done away with. There was no reason, so far as Pauline knew, why her husband should not acquaint her with his whereabouts, while there was every reason to believe that, were he on the face of the earth, he would make himself known, if it were only for the sake of reclaiming his two thousand pounds. He must have been drowned, she thought, his strength must have failed him, and he must have gone down when almost within reach of the shore, to which he was hastening. Drowned, dead, lost to her for ever! Not lost as she had once imagined him, seduced by the wiles and fascinations of another woman into temporary forgetfulness of her, for then there was a chance, and more than a chance, almost a certainty, that when those wiles and fascinations ceased to charm he would miss the clear brain and the ready

hand on which he had so long relied, and come back to claim their aid once more—not lost in that way, but totally lost, drowned, dead, passed away for ever.

To think of her husband in that phase was new to Pauline. She had never contemplated him under such circumstances. She had always thought of him with fierce jealousy, and a burning desire for revenge, as false to her, and neglectful of her. The idea that he was dead, had died guiltless of deceiving her, and with the full intention of carrying out the plan which he had confided to her, had never before entered her mind, and—no, it could not be true; if it had been she would have felt the keenest grief, the deepest sorrow; grief for his loss, regret for the cruel wrong she had done him in suspecting him. She felt nothing of all this now—he could not be dead.

Straightway Pauline's thoughts reverted to the circumstances in which she was placed, the persons by whom she was surrounded, and the way in which her future should be

managed. If the conclusions at which she had arrived were correct, if Tom Durham were not drowned, but, for some hitherto unexplained purpose of his own, was keeping himself in hiding, it is towards his sister probably that, when he considers it a proper opportunity, he will make some sign. Not to his wife; Pauline knew her husband well enough to understand completely how the knowledge that he had treated her badly in not keeping his appointment that morning, and in concealing himself from her so long, would prevent him from making his first advances to her; the girl slumbering there would be the first person to whom Tom Durham would reveal the fact that he was not dead, and if she, Pauline, ever wished for information about him, it was through that slumbering girl that it must be obtained.

She made a sudden change in the plan and prospects of her life, a shuffling of the cards, an entire revision of the game, all settled in an instant, too, as she sat in the easy-chair beside the bed, her hands clasped toge-

ther in her lap, her eyes fixed upon the motionless figure. Her sojourn in the wretchedly dull house in Great Walpole-street should speedily be brought to an end. She had borne long enough with that old woman's grimness and formality, with her icy patronage and impassable stiffness, with her pharisaical utterances and querulous complaints; she would have no more of such a life of dependence. The time during which she had been Mrs. Calverley's companion had not, indeed, been ill-spent. Had she not secured for herself that position, she would probably have remained in ignorance that the woman of whom she saw her husband taking leave was his sister; she would not have been intrusted with the secret of the Calverley and Claxton mystery, the possession of which gave her such power over all those concerned in it; she would never have made the acquaintance of Martin Gurwood. How strangely in earnest that man was, how innocent, and void of guile! And yet she was so sure that the suspicion which she had originally formed

about him—that he had a secret of his own—was correct; hence that impossibility to return your gaze, that immediate withdrawal of his soft beautiful eyes, that quivering of his delicate, sensitive mouth. It had served her purpose, that position of dependence, but now she would have no more of it. There is nothing to be gained by continuing with the grim old woman except the money, and Pauline sees her way to an equal amount of money, combined with far more freedom, and an infinitely pleasanter life.

A better life, too, if there be anything in that, Pauline wonders, with a shrug of her shoulders; for this slumbering girl, this mere child in her ignorance of the world's ways, is now left to herself, and is henceforth to live alone, with no one to battle for her, no one to shield her from the thousand and one assailants, to guide her through the thousand and one temptations to which she will be exposed. That shall be her task, Pauline thought to herself; to undertake it she had a prescriptive right, if she chose to declare the

truth, and to assert her relationship. There would be no occasion, however, to take that step, at all events for the present. She could trust to her influence with Martin Gurwood to procure for her the trust which she coveted, the position of Alice's companion and guardian. Her influence with Martin Gurwood, what did that amount to? Why did she experience an inward thrill of satisfaction in reflecting on that influence? Martin Gurwood! She thought of him as she had seen him first, under his mother's roof; she thought of him on the last occasion of their meeting, when they walked side by side in the Hendon lanes. Yes, her influence with Martin Gurwood was undoubtedly strong, and the knowledge of its strength gave her inexplicable satisfaction.

At twelve o'clock the next day, Pauline, from her position at the bedroom window, saw a hansom cab stop at the top of the hill, and two gentlemen, one of whom was Martin Gurwood, alight from it. Then Pauline, whose

bonnet and shawl lay ready to her hand, put them on without an instant's delay, and sallied forth.

She had not advanced more than fifty steps when she saw that her approach was perceived. Martin Gurwood looked up and said something to his companion, who, on their meeting, was presented to her as Mr. Statham.

‘The friend of whom I have already spoken to you, Madame Du Tertre,’ he said, ‘and whose advice has been most invaluable to me in this matter.’

Pauline gave a direct and earnest glance at Statham, a glance which enabled a woman of her natural quickness to recognise the presence of the characteristics which his friend had declared him to possess. Martin Gurwood was pliant and malleable; this man looked hard and unimpressionable as granite. If he and she were to be thrown much together for the future, it would be advisable, Pauline thought, that her wishes should agree as much as possible with his intentions.

‘I am pleased to see Mr. Statham,’ she said; ‘pleased, indeed, to see you both, for I have been anxiously expecting your arrival.’

‘There is no change in the patient’s condition, I suppose?’ asked Statham.

‘None; she still remains perfectly tranquil and asleep; but my own experience, and two or three signs which I have observed, tell me that this sleep will soon be at an end.’

‘It was in that expectation that we have hurried here,’ said Martin Gurwood. ‘Mr. Statham is of opinion that it would be impossible to conceal the truth from Mrs. Claxton any longer, and has accompanied me to assist in breaking the news to her.’

‘Ah, exactly,’ said Pauline. ‘Will you and Mr. Statham be very much surprised, very much horrified, if I venture to make a suggestion?’

‘Not the least,’ said Statham. ‘I am sure I answer for my friend and myself when I say that we are deeply grateful for the services you have already rendered us, although

the means for the end are certainly somewhat strong, and that we shall listen readily to anything you may have to propose.'

'Most certainly, yes,' assented Martin Gurwood.

'Well, then,' said Pauline, addressing herself to Statham, after a fleeting glance at Martin, 'my proposition is, that this ceremony of the breaking the news, which at such pain to yourself, as I know, you have come to perform, should be dispensed with altogether.'

'Dispensed with?' cried Statham.

'Altogether,' repeated Pauline.

'Do you mean that Mrs.—Mrs. Claxton should not be made acquainted with what has occurred?' asked Martin, in astonishment.

'With what has occurred,' said Pauline firmly, 'yes; with the circumstances under which it has occurred, no! She knows that the man whom she considered to be her husband is dead. Let her be informed that, during the unconscious state into which she fell on hearing the news, he has been buried, but for Heaven's sake, monsieur, let her be

kept in ignorance of the fact that he was not her husband, and that by his cruelty she is now a woman without name or position, abandoned and outcast. Why should we cover her with shame, and blight her life, with this announcement? *A quoi bon?* If we do not tell it to her, there is no one else who will. She has no friends but yourselves and me. She is too innocent and ignorant of the world to ask for any papers—a will, or anything of that kind. She has already, without inquiry, accepted Mr. Gurwood's guardianship at once and unsuspectingly, and she has not the faintest dream that the man whom she loved and the position which she held were other than she believed them.'

'Well, but—' said Martin.

'But what?' said Pauline, turning to him. 'Can you give me one reason why this horrible story should be told to her in its truth, why one more victim should be added to the number of those over whom the yellow flag waves, cutting them off from all the privileges of social citizenship, and dragging them down

to the depths of misery and shame? Ah, she is too young and too innocent for such a doom! Am I not right, Mr. Statham? Do you not agree with me?’

It was easy to see that the passionate earnestness of Pauline’s appeal had not been without its effect on Humphrey Statham. There was a tremulousness in his lip and in his voice as he said, ‘You certainly make out a strong case to support your views, Madame Du Tertre; but what do you propose should be done with this young lady?’

‘I propose,’ said Pauline, that she should live on in the belief that she is Mr. Claxton’s widow; and as it would be impossible, young and unsuspecting as she is, that she should be alone, I propose that I should live with her. Not on her, mind!’ she added, with a proud toss of her head. ‘I have a little money of my own—quite enough to keep me in independence—but I am a woman of the world, Mr. Statham, who has learned its ways from dire necessity, and has come out of the struggle I hope unimpaired. I was interested in

this girl's story before I saw her ; since I saw her my interest has naturally increased. Let it be as I say, and you will find your trust has not been wrongly bestowed !'

The two men stepped aside for a few minutes ; then Statham, raising his hat, approached Pauline.

'Have you well weighed the responsibility you are about to undertake, Madame Du Tertre?'

'I have,' she said, looking straight into his eyes, 'and accept it cheerfully.'

'Then,' said Humphrey, 'Mr. Gurwood consents that it should be as you say. For the present only, mind ; the arrangement is but temporary, and is liable to alteration at any moment.'

'I thank Mr. Gurwood most heartily,' said Pauline, turning to Martin, and holding out her hand, 'and you, too, Mr. Statham. As I said before, you will find in this instance that your trust has not been wrongly bestowed. I think, perhaps, it will be better to leave me to announce to Mrs. Calverley my intention

of leaving her, and I will take an early opportunity of doing so. I must hurry back now, as there is a chance of our friend waking up at any moment. You shall hear from me to-morrow, with full details of what I purpose to do.'

And, as she entered the garden gate, the two men regained their cab and were driven off to London.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. CALVERLEY LOSES HER COMPANION.

WITHIN half an hour after Pauline's return, Alice Claxton awoke to consciousness, dully and heavily at first, with dazed eyes, with a sense of oppression at her head and heart, with an impossibility to collect her thoughts, to make out where she was, or what was passing around her. Gradually this feeling of helplessness and indecision subsided. She recognised Pauline, who was bending over her and softly bathing her forehead with eau-de-cologne; and with that recognition the flood-gates of memory were opened, and the recollection of her widowhood and her grief rushed into her mind.

In an instant Pauline saw what had happened, one glance at the patient's face was sufficient for her practised eye.

‘You must not move, dear,’ she whispered, leaning forward, ‘you must not attempt to speak until we have given you something to sustain you. You have been very ill, my poor child, and even now must on no account be subjected to any excitement. Lie still for yet a few minutes, and then I will tell you anything you want to know.’

Alice did as she was bid, falling back on to the pillow from the sitting position in which she had endeavoured to raise herself, and closing her eyes, as though wearied with even that small attempt at motion. Meanwhile Pauline rang the bell, gave the servant orders to bring some jelly and other invalid food, which had been in preparation, and cast her eyes round the room to see that it was in exactly the same order as it had been when Alice was carried up to it. Everything just the same, the old desk replaced under the toilet-cover of the table, the books and papers through which Pauline had searched restored to their former position, no difference noticeable anywhere. Then Pauline seated herself

by the bedside, and, taking the jelly from the servant, fed Alice with it as though she had been a child, proceeding afterwards to bathe her face and hands, to comb her dark hair from off her forehead, to shake and smooth the pillows, doing all quietly and with the gentlest touch imaginable.

‘You are better now, dear,’ she said, when she had finished her task, and was again seated. ‘Your eyes are bright, and there is some sign of colour in your cheeks. You may speak now, dear, as I know you are anxious to do. You deserve some reward for your obedience.’

Then Alice raised herself on her elbow, and said in a low tone, quite different from her usual clear voice,

‘I feel strange yet, though, and not quite able to make out what has happened. Tell me,’ she said, ‘is it true about John Claxton, is he dead?’

‘Yes, dear,’ said Pauline, ‘it is true.’

‘Ah, you were to take me to him,’ cried the girl, raising her voice. ‘I recollect it all

now. Why am I here in bed? Why do we not start at once?’

‘We do not start because it would be useless,’ said Pauline. ‘You do not know what has happened, my poor child. On the evening when you were to have gone to London with me, just as we were on the point of setting out, you, who had fought so well against the excitement, gave way at last, and fell into a fainting fit.’

‘How long ago is that?’ said Alice, putting her hand to her head.

‘That is nearly three days ago,’ said Pauline, ‘and you have remained in a state of unconsciousness ever since, and—’

‘And now I am too late to see him,’ cried Alice wildly. ‘I know it by your manner, by your averted face. They cannot have buried him without my having seen him. It is not so? O, tell me at once.’

‘It would be worse than cruel to deceive you, my poor girl,’ said Pauline softly. ‘It is so.’

Then the little strength which remained

to Alice Claxton gave way, and she burst into a fit of grief, burying her face in the pillow, over which her long dark hair lay streaming, clutching at the coverlet with her hands, and sobbing forth broken ejaculations of misery and despair. Pauline did not attempt to interfere with her while she was in this state, but stood by the bedside calmly compassionate, waiting until the proxysm should be over, and the violence of Alice's grief should subside. It subsided after a time. Her head was raised from the pillow, the spasmodic action of the hands ceased, and although the tears still continued to flow, the ejaculations softened down into one oft-repeated wail, 'What will become of me? What will become of me?'

Then Pauline gently touched her outstretched hand, and said, 'What will become of you, my poor child, do you ask? While you have been lying here unconscious, there are others who have occupied themselves with your future.'

'My future?' cried Alice. 'Why should

they occupy themselves with that? How can they give me back my husband?’

‘They cannot indeed give you back your husband,’ said Pauline quietly, ‘but they can see that your life altogether is less dreary and more hopeful than it otherwise would be; and it is well for you, Alice,’ she said, calling her for the first time by her Christian name, ‘that you have found such friends. You have seen one of them already, the gentleman who came here to tell you of your loss—Mr. Gurwood.’

‘Ah,’ said Alice, ‘I remember him, the clergyman?’

‘Yes, the clergyman; he is a kind and a good man.’

‘Yes,’ said Alice reflectively, ‘he was very kind and thoughtful, I recollect that. But why did they send him; he does not belong to this parish. Why didn’t Mr. Tomlinson come? Is Mr. Gurwood a friend of his?’

‘Not that I know of,’ said Pauline, who had not the least idea who Mr. Tomlinson

might be. 'Mr. Gurwood was—is Mr. Calverley's step-son.'

'Mr. Calverley!' cried Alice, 'my poor dear John's partner? Ah, then, it was quite natural he should be sent to me.'

'Quite natural,' said Pauline, much relieved by finding her take the explanation so easily. 'Mr. Gurwood is, as I have said before, a very kind and a very good man. He will come and see you to-morrow or the next day, and tell you what he proposes you should do.'

'I suppose I shall have to leave this house?' said Alice, looking round her with a sigh.

'I should think so, Alice,' said Pauline. 'I should think it would be better for many reasons that you should, but I know nothing positively; Mr. Gurwood will talk to you about that when he comes. And now, dear, I must leave you for a while. I have to go to London to make some arrangements in my own affairs, but I will return as speedily as I can. I may see Mr. Gurwood, and I shall be glad

to tell him that you are almost yourself again.'

'Almost myself,' said Alice. 'Ah, no, never myself again! never myself again!'

Meanwhile the mistress of the house in Great Walpole-street had been in anything but an enviable frame of mind. It has been observed of Mrs. Calverley, that even when she was Miss Lorraine, and during the lives of both her husbands, her favourite position was standing upon her dignity, a position which, with some persons, is remarkably difficult to maintain.

Mrs. Calverley was of opinion that by the conduct both of her companion and of her son, her dignity had been knocked from under her, and she had been morally upset, and that, too, at a time when she had calculated on receiving increased homage: on taking her place as acknowledged head of the household. That Madame Du Tertre should ask to be relieved from her attendance at a time when of all others she might have

known that her presence would be necessary to console her friend in her affliction, and to aid her in devising schemes for the future, was in itself a scandal and a shame. But that her son Martin, who, as a clergyman of the Church of England, ought to be a pattern of filial obedience and all other virtues, should neglect his mother in the way that he did, going away to keep what he called business appointments day after day; above all, that he should omit to give her any definite answer to the generous proposition which she had made him, was more scandalous and more shameful.

So Mrs. Calverley remained swelling with spite and indignation, all the more fierce and bitter because she had to keep them to herself. And these were the first days of her triumph—days which she had thought to spend very differently, in receiving the delicate flattery and veiled homage which she had been accustomed to from Pauline, in listening to the protestations of gratitude which she had expected from her son. Now both of these

persons were absent—for Martin was so little at Great Walpole-street that his mother had small opportunity of conversation with him—and she was left in her grim solitude; but she knew sooner or later they would return, and when she did get the opportunity she was perfectly prepared to make it as uncomfortable for each of them as possible.

It was late in the afternoon, and Mrs. Calverley, who had so far given in to the fashion of the time, as to take her five-o'clock tea—which was served, not with the elegant appliances now common, but in a steaming breakfast-cup on an enormous silver salver—had settled herself to the consumption of what might be called her meal, when Pauline entered the room. She came forward rapidly, and taking her patroness's hand, bent over it and raised it to her lips. Mrs. Calverley gave her hand, or rather let it be taken, with sufficiently bad grace. She sat poker-like in her stiffness, with her lips tightly compressed. It was not her business to commence the conversation, and the delay gave her longer time

to reflect upon the bitter things she fully intended to say.

‘So at last I am able to once more reach my dear friend’s side,’ said Pauline, seating herself in close proximity. She saw at once the kind of reception in store for her, and though the course on which she had determined rendered her independent of Mrs. Calverley’s feelings towards her, she was too good a diplomatist to provoke where provocation was unnecessary.

‘You certainly have not hurried yourself to get there,’ said Mrs. Calverley, clipping the words out from between her lips. ‘I have now been left entirely to myself for—’

‘Do not render me more wretched by going into the details of the time of my absence,’ said Pauline; ‘it has impressed itself upon me with sufficient distinctness already.’

‘I should have thought, madame,’ said Mrs. Calverley unrelentingly, ‘that strictly brought up as you have always represented yourself to be, you would have understood, however pleasantly your time may have been

occupied, that your duty required you to be in this house.'

'However pleasantly my time may have been occupied!' cried Pauline. 'Each word that you utter is an additional stab. It is duty and duty alone which has called me away from your side. It is duty which imposes a farther task upon me, cruel, heart-rending task, which I have yet to declare to you! And you, who have been a life-long martyr to the discharge of your own duty, ought to have some pity for me in the discharge of mine.'

These last words were excellently chosen for her purpose. That she was a martyr, and an unrecognised martyr, was the one text on which Mrs. Calverley preached: to acknowledge her in that capacity was to pay her the greatest possible compliment. So, considerably mollified, she replied, 'If I felt annoyed at your absence, Palmyre, it was for your sake more than for my own. The loss of your society is a deprivation to me, but I am accustomed to deprivations and to crosses of all

kinds. I devoted myself to my husband—and had he listened to the counsel I gave him, he would be here at this moment—and I am prepared to devote myself to my son.’

‘Ah,’ said Pauline with earnestness, ‘Monsieur Martin!’

‘Yes, Palmyre,’ said Mrs. Calverley; ‘Monsieur Martin, as you speak of him in your foreign way, the Reverend Martin Gurwood, as he is generally called. I am prepared to devote myself to him. I have told him that I will remove him from that desolate country parish, and establish him here in London in a church of his own, that he shall live with me in this house, share my wealth, and dispense my charities.’

‘Martin in London,’ thought Pauline to herself. ‘Then it is in London that Alice and I must take up our abode.’ Then she said aloud, ‘And what does Monsieur Martin say to this grand, this generous proposition, madame?’

‘Ay, exactly—what does he say!’ cried Mrs. Calverley. ‘You may well ask that!’

You and every one else would have thought that he would have jumped at such an offer, wouldn't you? And so he would, doubtless, if it had come from any one else, but it is my lot to suffer!

'He has not refused it, madame?'

'No, he has not refused; he has given me no definite answer any way.'

'Ah, he will not refuse you, I am sure,' said Pauline, clasping her hands; 'the prospect of such a life with such a mother must overcome even his strict notions of self-denial. Ah, madame, if you could only know what a thrill of joy your words have sent through my heart, how what you have said has tended to disperse the black clouds which were gathering over me!'

'Dear me, Palmyre,' cried Mrs. Calverley, in her blank unimagined way, 'black clouds! What on earth are you talking about?'

'I told you just now that I had a yet farther sacrifice to make to duty. It is a sacrifice so great, so painful to me, that I

hardly dared to hint at it; but what you have said just now robs it somewhat of its sting. What a comfort it would be to me to know that you had some one to look after and cherish you, as you ought to be cherished, when I am gone.'

'What's that you said, Palmyre?' cried Mrs. Calverley, sharply indeed, but nothing like so viciously as Pauline had expected. 'You are gone! What do you mean by that?'

'When I am gone,' repeated Pauline, 'in obedience to duty which calls upon me. Ah, dear friend, why are you wealthy, and in high position, surrounded by comforts and luxury? If you were poor and needy, sick and struggling, I could reconcile it with my duty to remain here with you; as it is, I am called upon to leave you, and to devote myself to those to whom my poor services can be useful.'

'You must be more explicit, Palmyre,' said Mrs. Calverley, still without any trace of anger. Bold and haughty as she was, she had been somewhat disturbed at the idea of

having to break to her companion the news of her dismissal, and now she thought the difficulty seemed materially lightened.

‘It is a sad story,’ said Pauline, ‘but it will be interesting to you who have a benevolent heart.’

‘It is about your cousin, I suppose?’ said Mrs. Calverley.

‘My cousin?’ cried Pauline.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Calverley; ‘your cousin, who was lying ill at the poor lodging, she who knew no one in London but yourself, could not speak our language, and was utterly helpless; she is worse, I suppose? Perhaps she is dead!’

‘Tiens,’ said Pauline to herself, ‘it is lucky she reminded me about the cousin; in all the confusion and plotting I had almost forgotten what I had said. No, my dear friend,’ she said aloud, ‘my poor cousin still lives, and is, indeed, considerably easier and better than when I first went to her. A relation of hers, a brother-in-law, has found her out, and is being kind to her, as the poor are

always kind to one another; not, indeed, that this brother-in-law can be called poor, except in comparison with persons of wealth like yours. He is an old friend of mine; he knew my father, the artillery officer at Lyons, and used often to come to my husband's house when we were in business there.'

'He admired you then, and he has made an offer now, and you are going to be married to him?' said Mrs. Calverley, with an icy smile. 'Is that it, Palmyre; is that the sacrifice you feel yourself called upon to make?'

'Ah, my friend,' cried Pauline, 'there is no question of anything of that sort for me; my heart is buried in grief. No, this worthy man, who has known me so long, knows that I am what you call in your language, but for which we have no word in French, respectable. He knows that I can be trusted, and he offers to me a place of trust; he asks me to undertake a sacred charge.'

'Dear me,' again ejaculated Mrs. Calverley; 'what might that be?'

‘ This old friend of mine finds himself left as guardian and trustee for the widow and orphan of his former ward, a wretched young man—he must have been born under an evil star, for nothing seemed to prosper with him—and who has just died of consumption at Nice. The widow is, as I understand, a weak creature, very young, very pretty, and utterly inexperienced. Her husband during his lifetime never allowed her to do anything, and the consequence is that she is quite ignorant of the ways of the world, and would be easily snapped up by any one who might choose to take advantage of her. Being, as I have said, very pretty, and having a small competence of her own, I need scarcely tell you that there would be plenty of wretches on the look-out for her.’

‘ Wretches, indeed!’ cried Mrs. Calverley. ‘ One of the few curses of wealth is that it renders one liable to be so beset.’

‘ My old friend,’ then pursued Pauline, ‘ a warm-hearted man, who preserves a grateful recollection of the manner in which at the

outset of his life he was befriended by his dead ward's father, and desirous of shielding the widow and orphans to the best of his power, offered me a modest salary to take up my abode with this young woman, and to become her protector and look after her generally.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Calverley, with a sniff, 'and what did you say to that?'

'I refused altogether. I told him that I was already living with one whom fortune had cruelly treated in depriving her of her only protector, and who from her resignation and goodness commanded my deepest sympathy. But my old friend refused to accept this explanation, and after questioning me closely about you and your position, pointed out that if I were doing a good action in living with you, who were wealthy and powerful, how much more rigorously should I be discharging my duty in giving myself up to those who, while equally afflicted with you in the loss of those they loved, were not endowed with your circumstances, worse than

all, were not endowed with your patience and Christian resignation.'

A faint flush of pleasure glowed on Mrs. Calverley's pale cheeks. 'There is something in that,' she said; 'it was a sensible remark. My trouble has been lifelong, I have been schooled in it from my youth; but this poor person is only just beginning to know the miseries of the world. Well, Palmyre, what did you say then?'

'I felt, dear friend, that, as you say, the argument was strong, the appeal almost irresistible; but I said that I could give no definite reply; that, however strongly my duty might call me elsewhere, my heart was with you; that I would lay the case before you, exactly as it stood, and unless I had your free consent I should not separate myself from you.'

Outwardly calm and composed, Mrs. Calverley was inwardly in a state of great delight. Not merely did she see her way to getting rid of her companion without any trouble, but she would receive the greatest

credit for her magnanimity and self-denial in giving Pauline up to those whose need was greater than her own. It was, however, necessary that she should be cautious and reticent to the last, so before pledging herself to anything definite Mrs. Calverley said:

‘You, Palmyre, who know my character so well, must be perfectly aware that the circumstances which you have narrated to me are such as would command my warmest sympathies, but before I give you any definite answer, I should like to ask you one or two questions. The little household over which you are called upon to preside will be established in France, I presume?’

‘No,’ said Pauline, ‘in England. The poor widow is an Englishwoman, and declines to go away with her little child, a charming little creature, from the land of her birth.’

‘In England?’ cried Mrs. Calverley. ‘And whereabouts in England?’

‘Nothing is yet settled,’ said Pauline, ‘but I have no doubt that I should have some hand in deciding that, and all my influence

would be used to remain in the neighbourhood of London.'

Mrs. Calverley was overjoyed at this announcement; she thought she saw her way to making use of her quondam ally without the necessity of recompensing her.

She was silent for a few minutes. Then she said, in a tone which she tried to modulate as much as possible, but which was unmistakably triumphant, 'I have reflected, Palmyre, and I find it is again my duty to exercise that power of self-denial with which I have fortunately been imbued. These poor creatures have greater need of you than I, and however much I may suffer by the abnegation, I waive my claim upon you—I give you up to them.'

'You are an angel,' said Pauline, bending down to kiss her friend's hand. Her face was necessarily hidden, but if any one could have caught a glimpse of it they would have seen on it an expression of intense amusement.

'I shall see you again, I suppose?' said Mrs. Calverley.

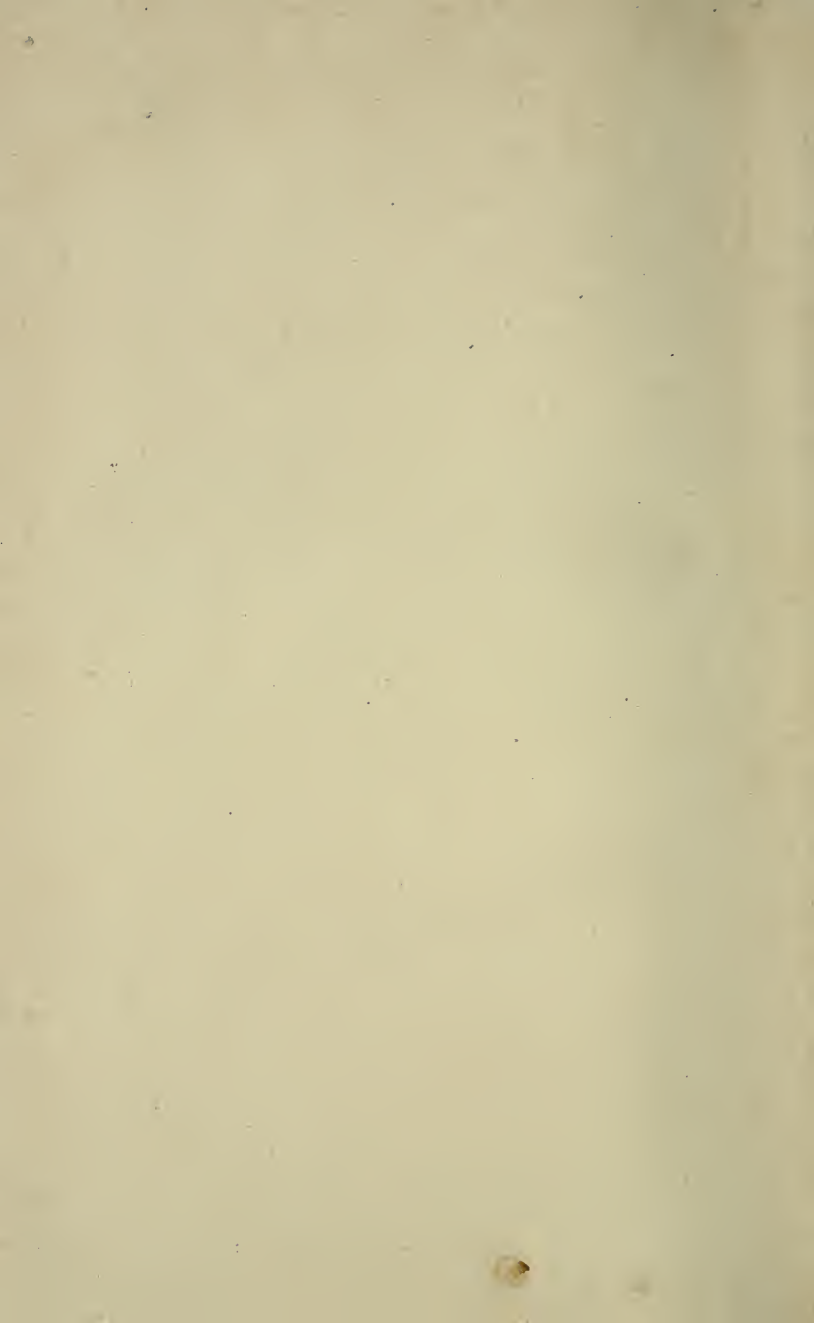
‘O, certainly,’ said Pauline; ‘I shall let you know as soon as anything is settled, and I sincerely trust that my duties will not be so constant and so binding as to prevent my frequently coming to visit my best and dearest friend.’

‘Does she take me for a fool, this woman?’ said Pauline when she had gained the solitude of her bedroom, ‘or is she so blinded by her own folly as to believe that other people are so weak as she? However, the difficulty, such as it was, has been easily arranged, and all is now clear for me to commence my new manner of life.’

END OF VOL. II.

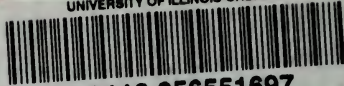
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